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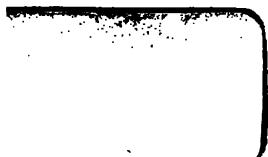
# SORROWS OF A GOLFER'S WIFE



BY  
EDWARD KENNEDY

Old subject

10/6



Mary E. (Loring).

NCW  
Kennard



# THE SORROWS OF A GOLFER'S WIFE



# *THE SORROWS OF A GOLFER'S WIFE*

BY

*Mrs EDWARD KENNARD*

*Author of*

*A Riverside Romance, 'Catch of the County,'  
'Hunting Girl,' 'Guide Book for Lady Cyclists,'  
Etc., Etc.*

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To

MY SISTERS IN MISFORTUNE

THIS LITTLE WORK IS IN ALL SYMPATHY

Inscribed

BY A SUFFERER FROM THE GREAT GOLF FEVER



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# The Sorrows of a Golfer's Wife

## CHAPTER I

### TAKING TO GOLF

WE have been married nine years, and although we have had our little tiffs and occasional disagreements, it has become the fashion amongst our intimate friends to hold us up as a model couple. To do Jack justice, he is—or rather *was*—a good specimen of a husband, as husbands go nowadays. He had but one fault, which, poor dear, he was not altogether responsible for. From the very commencement of his career, Fate had treated him kindly, and at the comparatively early age of eighteen, he came into a fortune of over £5000 a year. Now, people with £5000 a year don't work; those that do are the exceptions. Jack belonged to the rule,

and his misfortune consisted in having no profession and nothing real to occupy his time. At least, I always believed so, although he himself invariably declared that he did not want to work, and was perfectly happy as he was. It might be so, but in my humble opinion he lost sight of the pernicious effect a protracted course of idleness is bound to have on the moral character.

Jack fiddled away his time to his complete satisfaction, but it ought to have been more usefully employed. Of course, I tried to persuade him to go into Parliament. I imagine that 'The House' is the goal of every ambitious woman's aspirations, and I don't mind confessing I *am* ambitious. But Jack flatly refused to have anything to do with the legislation of his country, declared we were the victims of too many laws as it was, and he would not be a party to framing any more; and when we went to London for the season, I had the mortification of not being invited to the great political functions. Downing Street knew me not; and the doors of the Foreign Office were closed. To my grief, that boor of a Jack vowed he vastly preferred the pleasures of Hurlingham and Ranelagh to those of Westminster. It was

useless my representing that he did not make the most of the advantages conferred upon him by birth. He only laughed good-humouredly in reply, and sealed my mouth with a kiss. After that, what use to continue the argument? It was a regular man's way of putting a stop to it.

As already explained, we were the very best of friends, but our minds were cast in different moulds. I often told him that we ought to change sex. He should have been the woman, I the man. He simply exploded when I made this remark, and taking me by the wrists, forced them backwards until I was fain to retract my words for very pain. But, directly I regained my liberty, I informed him, with righteous contempt, that brute strength counted for nothing, and was a sign of degeneracy, as showing a similitude to the animals. Jack hunted, fished, shot, and played various games. For these latter he possessed an aptitude which made me sigh. It seemed to me so much ability wasted. Except on a pouring wet day, my lord and master contrived to amuse himself well enough. He was an athletic creature, with a healthy appetite, an excellent temper, and sound in wind and limb. Nevertheless, there was no getting rid of him. By this, I mean that he was for ever hanging about the house, fussing and



interfering with the servants, and generally encroaching upon what I considered my woman's province. He meant no harm by it, but it was irritating to the nerves to have a great man stalking about the rooms at all hours of the day. In short, like many another wealthy squire, he suffered from the curse of idleness. He was a lion among mice in his own home, but he looked at the outside world through a microscope. Still, on the whole, harmony reigned throughout our establishment, and it is not going beyond the mark to say that we jogged along decidedly better than the majority of married couples.

There came a time, however, when Jack met with a bad accident in the hunting field, and sprained the muscles of his right thigh so severely that, for a considerable period, he was forced to give up his favourite amusement. This was a great blow, for can you imagine anything more utterly melancholy than a horsey man living in the centre of a crack hunting country, and unable to ride? He at once becomes dethroned from a human being to a misery. Jack fretted his heart out. I must say I felt for the poor fellow; he was so completely thrown on his beam ends, and the resources of a yellow-backed novel did not suffice. I therefore proposed that

we should go abroad, and even suggested Monte Carlo, although I do not approve of gambling. But, for some reason or other, he did not take to the idea.

‘When one does not feel quite up to the mark, one is better in one’s own home than anywhere else,’ he remarked, somewhat despondently.

I could not gainsay the truth of this observation, so we stayed on in Midlandshire, both of us getting more and more bored, and, as a consequence, irritable. For, sad to say, when married people are thrown altogether on their own resources and receive no help from the outside world, they exhibit a deplorable tendency, as a rule, to spar with one another. It is a means of passing the time, and the daily monotony of constant intercourse is enlivened by argument. However this may be, I know that Jack and I always agreed better when we were not dependent entirely on each other for amusement. The presence of a third person often makes the wheels of the matrimonial coach run smoother. So we were both glad when a frost came and one of Jack’s greatest friends—a man named George Donaldson—offered to pay us a visit.

‘George will liven us up, Janie,’ said Jack,

more cheerfully than he had spoken for days. 'By all means write and tell him to come. He is such a capital old chap. The mere sight of him will do me good.'

I did as I was bidden, with the result that, two days later, Mr Donaldson arrived. He was what is termed 'a man's man,' and although by no means a bad sort of fellow, I never could get up much sentiment about him. He was Jack's friend, not mine. Nevertheless, I was very willing to welcome him in that capacity, for my better half needed male companionship.

'We are so glad you have come,' I said cordially. 'Poor Jack has been most dreadfully dull all this time, and wants cheering up.'

'Ah! poor chap,' responded Mr Donaldson. 'It is crushing hard lines for him being laid up so early in the hunting season. Those sprained muscles are nasty things to cure. I had one once, and it took me a deuce of a time to get rid of. Indeed, I ended by thinking I never should be well.'

'That is just how I feel,' said Jack. 'And the worst of it is, I never was better in my life, apart from my beastly old leg.'

'Have you tried riding at all, dear boy?' inquired George sympathetically.

‘Yes, but it gives me such infernal pain in the thigh that I literally screamed aloud. Since then the doctor has absolutely forbidden equestrian exercise, so here I am, as savage as a bear with a sore head.’

‘You must not believe quite all he tells you,’ I interposed. ‘Considering the trying nature of the circumstances, Jack really has been very fairly good. He only wants one thing to recover the normal sweetness of his temper.’

‘And what is that?’ demanded George Donaldson.

‘He suffers from the usual complaint of the rich man—too much to eat; too little to do. He wants an occupation, or, failing that, an amusement.’

‘Ah! Mrs Calthorpe, you are always down on the men. It’s very well to talk about work, but there is not enough work for us all to do. Indeed, it is a blessing for the majority that the minority are not obliged to make galley slaves of themselves.’ So saying, he stretched his fine, muscular limbs and smiled a superior smile at me. That smile had the effect, in vulgar parlance, of putting my back up. Donaldson pandered to Jack’s weaknesses, and went out of his way to make them appear virtues. When-

ever he stayed with us, I always felt that my influence over my husband was lessened. And a woman never really likes a man who possesses almost as much power over her lord and master as she does herself. There is generally warfare between them, even although it be of that subtle kind which escapes observation. Jack had not the faintest notion that George Donaldson and I were not bosom friends. Some men are curiously obtuse, but there are occasions when their obtuseness has advantages. To-day, I rejoiced that he had no idea his friend and I did not exactly hit it off. As for George, no doubt he was not aware that I knew he was in the habit of alluding to me behind my back as 'a bit of a handful.' That expression had once been repeated to me through the medium of a mutual friend, and I don't mind confessing it had rankled ever since. For I did not consider it deserved, and prided myself on the influence I had over my husband being entirely for his good. But I am told this is an amiable delusion common to all wives. However, I am digressing after my wont. Pray have patience.

Jack cheered up a good deal after Mr Donaldson's arrival. His appetite improved, and he came to the comforting conclusion that he had

still a few more years to live in this vale of tears. Like the majority of his sex, he suffered from acute depression of spirits directly the slightest ailment assailed him. George succeeded in distracting his thoughts from the subject of his own health, and in this way did him a considerable service. What Jack complained most of was want of exercise. He had been in hard condition prior to his accident, and had hunted regularly five days a week.

‘I shall get so infernally fat,’ he observed pathetically.

‘You can walk, can’t you?’ inquired George.

‘Yes; but a constitutional with no other object save that of hygiene is infernally slow.’ And Jack tried politely to hide a yawn.

Then, in an evil hour, George Donaldson made the suggestion which has sapped all my domestic peace, and reduced me to the humiliating position of a nonentity and a mere *golfer’s* wife. I speak with feeling, for, from being the first person to be considered in our establishment, I am now nowhere in comparison with Silvertown balls, brassies, cleeks, lofters, niblicks, etc. You may laugh, but I assure you in all seriousness that it was a bad day for me when George said to my husband,

'Well, old man, if you don't care for legging it along the roads without an object, which I agree with you in thinking deadly dull work, why the dickens don't you start golf? It is the best game in the world, and would be the very thing for you in your present condition. If you once take to golf, you're a happy man, and a man with an occupation for the remainder of your life.'

'I have not the least idea how to play it,' said Jack dubiously.

'Perhaps not, but that is no reason why you should not learn. Everyone is mad about it nowadays, and, as I said before, you are a made man if you develop a taste for it.'

'What a taste, to be sure!' I exclaimed scornfully; for I could not help thinking that George might have proposed some more profitable employment. Somewhat to my surprise—for Jack is naturally indolent—he took to the idea, and the very next morning both gentlemen sallied forth into our fields with the intention of marking out a golf course. We had about twenty acres of grass land attached to the hunting box which we occupied. Hitherto we had done a little amateur farming, and, not being on too extended a scale, it had paid very fairly.

In ordinary years we got our hay off the ground, and kept a few sheep and oxen during the winter months. After being fattened, they were usually sold at a profit.

It took the two gentlemen, assisted by the gardener, the stud groom, the butler and three of the stablemen all the morning to lay out the proposed golf course. The former came into luncheon with huge appetites, and were off again to select more greens immediately the meal was over. I could not accuse them of lounging about the house on this particular day. Jack looked more cheerful than he had done for ages, and, little knowing what was in store, I congratulated myself on his having found such a nice amusement, especially as it was one that took him out of doors, and ensured fresh air and exercise. I had not the faintest notion what the golf mania entailed when once it was fully developed. If I had known, instead of smiling on my lord and master and encouraging him to proceed, I should have taken up George's irons and made a bonfire of them—at anyrate, of that portion which would burn. Perhaps it is as well that we are not able to peer into the pages of Futurity. We should find much there to give us pause. If anyone



had assured me that my husband would become so enthusiastic about a mere game that he would talk of it to the exclusion of every other topic, think of nothing else morning, noon and night, and end by actually *living* for it, I would not have believed him. I should have given Jack credit for more sense than to become the slave of a wooden stick and a white-washed ball. However, I must not anticipate. It is better for me to endeavour to put down events exactly as they happened, and in their proper sequence.

## CHAPTER II

### 'THEM GREENS'

FROM the very first, Jack appeared quite enamoured of the game of golf. On the opening day, when darkness drove him indoors, his face wore a flush of health, and I listened with pleasure to his descriptions of the new amusement to which his friend had introduced him.

On the following morning the pair sallied out again, and I saw nothing of my hubby until luncheon time. This was rather annoying, since it so happened I had to pay the servants their monthly wages, and wanted a cheque for the purpose. My habits are methodical, and I pay punctually, as a rule. It is the best way of managing and retaining control over a household. Not wishing to depart from my usual custom, I put on my hat and walked to the nearest field, which Jack and George Donaldson were just entering.

'Can you come in for a moment, dear?' I asked in all confidence, never dreaming that Jack would meet the request with a refusal. 'I shall not keep you long. I only want you to write out a cheque or two for current expenses.'

'You must wait, Janie,' he responded. 'I cannot possibly come now. George and I are having a first-rate game, and would you believe it, at the present moment I am actually two holes to the good. He is giving me a stroke a hole.' And he beamed upon me in the most cheerful manner.

'You forget that I do not understand the game. Your golfing language is so much gibberish to me,' I replied, seeing the uselessness of pressing my request. I therefore stood for a minute or two and watched the players, being anxious, if the truth must be told, to discover wherein the excitement consisted. It was Jack's turn to drive—that, I was assured, was the correct term. Barker, our stud groom, who accompanied his master, and carried a variety of implements, now bent down. He took a handful of sand from a wooden box close by, and with his big fingers squeezed it into the shape of a small pyramid. This he

carefully poised on a spot where the grass grew extra short. He was some time before the operation was performed to his satisfaction. Jack watched it with interest, throwing out sundry suggestions. When all was ready, he turned to me, and, desirous of displaying his superior knowledge, said,—

‘That is called a “tee up,” Janie.’

‘Oh! indeed,’ I responded. ‘May I ask if it is imperative to take Barker away from his work at an hour when, by rights, he ought to be busy with the horses?’ And I looked inquiringly at Jack.

‘He can see to them later on,’ was the answer. ‘Barker is awfully useful as a caddie.’

‘A caddie! What in the name of goodness is that?’

Jack laughed. ‘You little ignoramus! A caddie is a caddie, of course.’

‘So I infer; but that explanation, lucid as it is, does not, unfortunately, enlighten my ignorance, of which you complain.’

‘A caddie,’ here interposed Mr Donaldson, ‘merely means an individual—usually a boy—who carries the clubs, and whose duty it is to watch where the ball descends after each stroke.’

‘I am much obliged for the information,’ I

replied. 'Forgive my stupidity if I put another question. Is it necessary that the caddie should be paid at the rate of thirty shillings a week? That, I believe, is the amount received by Barker.'

'Come, shut up, Janie,' said Jack testily. 'We need not go into that just now. Barker's business is to do precisely what I tell him to do.'

'I do not venture to dispute it; I only doubt the wisdom of taking him away from a lot of valuable horses in order to carry about a few sticks.'

'He has wonderful eyesight,' said Jack apologetically. 'He always sees where the ball goes, and you know, Janie, how short-sighted I am.'

'And yet you can hunt,' I observed, with the sarcasm which is one of my failings. Time has since taught me that it does not do to say sharp things at other people's expense, but in those days I seldom resisted the temptation. Jack was a little annoyed by my remarks, but instead of continuing the discussion, he placed his ball on the top of the 'tee' and said,—

'Now, Janie, don't baulk me with any more talk, there's a dear, good soul. I'm going to drive off. Do you see that white flag yonder?

That is in green No. 6, and the object of the game is to get to each green in as few strokes as possible.'

Upon this, Jack proceeded to put himself into an attitude which was not wholly becoming to his manly style of beauty. He stood with his legs firmly planted and wide apart. The right toe was turned out, the left slanted in. His knees were slightly bent, his back rounded. He squared his elbows as a preliminary, then raised the driver aloft and waggled it several times in the most absurd manner. This, I was informed, was the proper way in which to take aim. In my humble opinion, anything more calculated to divert the eye could not well have been devised. After quite a minute of anxious indecision, he suddenly swung the club far over his head, and smote at the ball with all his strength. I laughed out loud. Perhaps you suppose that, after these numerous preparations, the ball went bounding into infinite space. Not it. Jack made a clean miss, and, losing his balance, fell full length on the ground. He picked himself up, looking rather rueful.

'That comes of wanting to show off,' he said. 'If you had not been there, Janie, the chances are I should not have missed. You made me fizzle.'

'Thank you,' I replied, tossing my head aloft. 'That is a very pretty speech, and one that does credit to your marital politeness. All the same, I fail to see what my presence had to do with your missing the ball. However, by all means assume that I am the culprit if it affords you any satisfaction. You are but taking a leaf out of your ancestor's book who inhabited the Garden of Eden.'

'Come, Janie, have a try yourself,' said Jack good-naturedly, ignoring my jibes, as, to do him justice, he generally did. So saying, he offered me his club, I by this time having effectually interrupted their game. I don't attempt to defend myself. I am a very faulty person, cursed with an exaggerated sensitiveness and a warm temper. The two combined are always getting me into trouble. I could see that Jack was quite happy without me, and secretly longed for my absence. Instead, therefore, of taking his offer as it was meant, I turned up my nose, and said, 'Not I. It is an idiotic game, and for my part, I can see nothing whatever in it.'

From that day, partly from ill-humour, partly from an inward conviction that golf required an immense deal of skill and practice, I set my face obstinately against it. I jeered at the

pastime, I scoffed at and derided it. If my object were to vex Jack, I succeeded only too well. He might have climbed to the very tip-top of the ladder had he directed as much energy to any sensible pursuit as he now devoted to golf. He was a changed being. Little by little, our household became revolutionised. All the able-bodied men connected with the establishment were gradually pressed into the golfer's service. When George Donaldson left, Barker was promoted to playing with his master. It was not long before he too caught the mania. Then Charles, our second horseman, took Barker's place as caddie, and the horses were left more and more to the care of under-strappers. Not that I can accuse Barker of neglecting them, but he was unable to devote the same time and attention to his charges when, from early morn until dusk, he was playing golf in the fields with Jack. But this was only the beginning of my troubles. One day I went round the kitchen garden, and found things there all behindhand. Jack had ordered the gardener on to the golf ground to roll the greens and flatten them down with a heavy roller. It was useless to send for him. I was rapidly learning that golf was a rival, possessing greater charms than I. This



was a pleasing lesson for a fond wife, as you may imagine. With regard to Johnson—that is our gardener's name—I watched my opportunity and contrived to waylay him on his return. The poor fellow, who had been in our service ever since we married, was literally running down with perspiration. As I stopped him, he mopped his damp brow with a red cotton pocket handkerchief.

‘Johnson,’ I said, ‘I want to speak to you about the garden,’ and I fixed a severe eye upon him, for I was vexed at certain traces of neglect.

‘Ah, mum,’ he responded dolefully, ‘you may well do that. It goes to my heart to see it as it is, that it does. But what will you have? I can’t be in two places at once, do what I will. The thing ain’t possible.’

‘It is not your fault if you are not ubiquitous,’ I said soothingly, for he had a nervous temperament, and often a trifle sufficed to render him unhappy.

‘Thank you, mum. You are very kind, I am sure,’ and once more he applied the handkerchief to his brow.

‘The garden, Johnson, ought to be your first duty,’ I remarked.

‘One would have thought so,’ he sighed in

return, for, to do him justice, his heart was centred in his work. ‘But the master’s orders must be obeyed, and he evidently thinks otherwise. I planted a nice lot of spring cauliflowers yesterday, and was just a-going to water ’em.’ (‘I shouldn’t wonder if they was all dead by now.’ This parenthetically.) ‘I had my water cans all ready filled, when Mr Calthorpe, he sent for me to the golf ground. I was that put about, that I made so bold as to mention the cauliflowers. I pointed out that the garden was not being done by as it should. Upon this, the master flared up all of a sudden like, and said he did not care a damn what became of a rotten lot of green stuff—that was the cauliflowers, if you please, mum—and that the garden might go to the devil, but have his greens rolled he must and would. It give me quite a turn, I can assure you.’

‘Never mind, Johnson,’ I said consolingly. ‘You must not take these small matters too seriously. Mr Calthorpe does not mean all that he says.’

‘I hope not, mum. As for those blessed greens—I’ve been at them nearly the whole of the day, and you have no idea what hard work it is rolling them. I’d a deal sooner

attend to my garden, for I'm running down with sweat.'

'I must speak to Mr Calthorpe on the subject,' I said, with all the dignity of a woman accustomed to have her own way. 'If he wants the greens rolled, he must engage a proper man for the purpose. You have plenty to do in your own department without your time being taken up over golf.'

'Indeed I have, mum,' he answered gratefully. 'There's the ivy all wants trimming, and I can hardly spare a day to do it, and there's the spring seeds to get in the ground; but there! one pair of hands can't do everything—not but what I'm willing, and it grieves me more than you'd believe to see the place out of order for the sake of them greens.'

He uttered the concluding words in such tones of disgust that I could not refrain from laughing. My sympathies, however, were entirely with Johnson.

'Well,' I said again, 'I will speak to Mr Calthorpe, and have no doubt matters will all come right, as far as you are concerned.'

Hitherto, I had invariably been the ruling spirit of the establishment. It was sufficient for me to express a wish for Jack to gratify

it. He was one of those good-natured, easy-going people who hate being bothered, and who, from sheer indolence, allow power to slip out of their hands. I had assumed the reins of government quite naturally. If appealed to, Jack’s usual answer was, I might settle things as I liked, as long as he was not troubled. I did not see it then, but I have thought since that a man is wrong to shift responsibility from his own shoulders on to the ones of those with whom he lives, simply because he is too lazy to exert himself.

When I spoke seriously to Jack about taking Johnson away from his work, I therefore fully anticipated that he would immediately yield to my remonstrances, as he had done a hundred times before. Alas! the old, convenient order of things was clearly at an end. Jack substantially repeated what he had said to Johnson, only, instead of using the naughty word which began with d, in consideration of my feelings, he employed the scarcely more elegant one of ‘blow.’ ‘He did not care a “blow” what happened to the garden, but he must have the greens attended to first and foremost. What were a few miserable cabbages and potatoes to him, in comparison with the pleasure afforded

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by the fascinating and absorbing game of golf?'

It was useless attempting to argue or reason with a man in such a frame of mind. For the time being he had clearly taken leave of his senses. I suggested hiring someone for the purpose of attending entirely to the precious greens, but Jack fell back on the customary excuse of the head of an establishment, and vowed he was short of cash, and did not wish to incur any new expense for the present. This plea silenced me. I sighed and said no more—at least, on that occasion.

## CHAPTER III

### JOHNSON COMPLAINS

So now, if you please, Johnson's time was occupied in watering the greens with a huge watering pot, whilst his cauliflowers died for want of moisture. He rolled them with a heavy iron roller, the kitchen garden, meanwhile, being almost entirely neglected. He was far from being a strong man, and the work exhausted him greatly. Indeed, he was hardly able for it, for, in addition to the rolling, Jack made him beat the ground immediately surrounding the flags with a heavy wooden hod. This required immense muscular strength, and I have often seen drops of perspiration roll from Johnson's forehead whilst so engaged. My expostulations were vain, and I smarted from a novel sense of defeat. Jack had suddenly developed a disagreeably masterful spirit, and would brook no opposition. I wondered

what had come to him, and found myself deploring the energy which golf had called into life. Meantime, there was a certain amount of friction between us, for, after promising Johnson that he should be relieved from his new tasks, I felt I was humbled in his eyes. I had failed to assert my supremacy, and was forced to admit myself vanquished in the matter of those detested greens. My heart swelled with indignation. The garden was eminently useful. It supplied the house with vegetables, and I did not relish the idea of having to pay a green-grocer's bill in future, merely for the sake of a foolish game. But Jack would not listen to reason. He—my husband—who had always been so considerate and yielding, was now so no longer. As the days went by, he developed a most reprehensible spirit of independence. Mark you, Jack was no molly-coddle. I should have been the first to despise him had he really been a poor, tame, henpecked individual; but in small matters he had always hitherto deferred to me. If there had been any sense in this new departure of his, I should have hailed it with pleasure, but that the common interests of the establishment should be sacrificed to *golf*, seemed to me simply absurd. I felt a

growing irritation against the game, all the greater because I had not as yet assumed an attitude of open hostility. That was to come later on. It took me some little time to realise the situation, and, in vulgar parlance, to grasp that my nose was gradually but surely being put out of joint. There was but one crumb of comfort in the whole business. Jack was happy and amused, and he had even forgotten to talk of his ailments—a sure sign that they did not distress him much.

Things were in this state when, one afternoon, I happened to meet Johnson, looking the picture of despair. He had just come from the golf ground, where, as usual, he had spent the morning. I saw at a glance that he was terribly put out. His countenance wore a most woe-begone expression.

‘Hulloa, Johnson,’ I exclaimed, ‘what is the matter? You do not look like yourself.’ And I pulled up short.

His face worked in a distressing manner. I could see that he was much moved. I feared some domestic calamity had taken place.

‘Nothing wrong with your wife or family, I hope?’ I inquired anxiously.

There was a pause, during which he was



evidently struggling with his emotions. Then he suddenly burst out, 'You'll excuse me, mum, but I can contain my feelings no longer. I've been with you going on for ten years, and sorry I'd be to part. I'm used to the place, but if this sort of thing is to go on, I had better leave, for it is impossible to give satisfaction, and that's the truth.'

'But, Johnson, I have never complained, and I am quite aware that you would prefer to work more in the garden if your time were not otherwise employed.'

'Don't mention it, mum. That beastly golf!—begging your pardon for using such language afore you; but there, I can't 'elp myself. It makes my blood reg'lar boil whenever I think of it.'

Johnson was generally a man of mild speech. His nature was meek and long-suffering. I was aware of this fact, and therefore was surprised at the outbreak. To tell the truth, I liked him all the better for it. I felt that we were bound together by a mutual tie. We sympathised on one subject, at anyrate. It was something to know that I did not stand alone in my opinions. I suspected that some misfortune had occurred, and took a secret

pleasure in the fact. Perhaps the flags had been stolen, or the clubs appropriated.

‘You need not be afraid to say what you like about golf before me, Johnson,’ I said encouragingly. ‘I fancy I think pretty much the same of it as yourself.’ And I eyed him benevolently.

‘I haven’t a word to say agin the game *as a game*, mum. It ’ud be well enough for a set of young clerks, or such-like, cooped up in a horfice all day long. No doubt fresh air and exercise would benefit them; but to make a reg’lar business of it, and keep other folk from their work—there! it beats me altogether.’

‘I quite agree with you, Johnson. Fortunately, or unfortunately, however, we don’t all think alike. Has anything happened to-day to put you out more than usual? But I need scarcely ask.’

‘Indeed, mum, and it’s small wonder if I feel upset. There ain’t a man in my position as wouldn’t. You know the big yellow hen with the feathered feet?’

I nodded my head in assent; and thus encouraged, he proceeded,—

‘Waal, she was sitting beautiful. There were no less than fourteen eggs in all, just about to

be hatched. I had taken her off for a while to give the poor thing a bit of food and some water, when a message comes from the house, 'Wanted at once on the golf ground.' It was no use my saying anything to the master. The chances are he would not have listened, and the long and the short of the matter was, I 'ad to go. What with one little fiddling job and another, I stayed on that blessed ground the best part of two hours. All the time, I was on thorns thinking of my yellow hen—'

'I can well believe that,' I interposed.

Johnson shot a grateful glance at me. 'Directly I was free again,' he continued, 'I went to the hen-house, and would you credit it, mum, out of the whole fourteen eggs, there was not one that was not smashed. The other hens 'ad got at them in my absence, and pecked them to pieces. I declare you could 'ave knocked me down with a feather.' And Johnson heaved a tragical sigh.

'That was truly vexatious,' I observed sympathetically.

'You may say that, mum. Says I to myself, says I, "Where is the game of golf as is worth fourteen fine young fowls?" They mightn't all 'ave lived; but still, they might. Anyway, I should 'ave reared the most of 'em.'

I could feel the indignant colour mounting to my face. 'Really, this is too bad,' I said, with considerable warmth. 'I shall make a point of letting Mr Calthorpe know what happens when he insists on taking you away from your work. It must not be allowed to continue.'

The words in themselves were brave; unfortunately, I no longer felt much confidence in my own powers. Jack had the golf fever too strong upon him to listen to the voice of common sense. I endeavoured to comfort Johnson as best I could, but he listened with passive dejection to my remarks. I believe he knew that my power had gone from me, and that henceforth I could not shield him from his master's commands. In future, it seemed as if orders would have to be taken from Jack, not me. I felt humbled and humiliated. I think I have already stated that, after George Donaldson's departure, Barker was promoted to the proud position of companion golfer to my better half. At first he protested, and thereby rose in my esteem; but after he had played a few times he too caught the plague—for I can call it by no other name—and became as enthusiastic as Jack. And now arose a curious state of things.

Henceforth was seen the anomaly of Johnson, the gardener, daily battenning the greens and toiling grudgingly round the golf course, in order to render it in good order for Mr Barker—the stud groom—to play upon. Verily there was a comic side to the situation had not my heart been so full of growing bitterness. It says much for Johnson's amiability of disposition that he did not give warning then and there, but contented himself with muttered protests, which resembled the sullen rumbling of distant thunder when the air is charged with electricity, but the storm has not yet burst.

Meanwhile, had it not been for the children, I should have spent my days in almost complete solitude. Somehow, although I had been wont to inveigh against the constant presence of an idle man in the house, I missed the companionship of my husband. With all his faults, Jack was Jack, and no one could quite replace him. I had grown accustomed to his society.

Formerly he would occasionally drive me to call on some of the neighbours. Many of them lived at a considerable distance. We had a very high-spirited pair of cobs, and during a frost, or on a non-hunting day, Jack had no objection to handl-

ing the ribbons. These drives were most enjoyable. I much preferred sitting beside him in our comfortable mail phaeton to being all by myself in the victoria. Now that Jack was getting a little better, I thought it a good opportunity to return some of the visits of inquiry which had been made immediately after his accident. I said as much to him. He at once pulled a long face.

‘If I come with you, Janie,’ he said disconsolately, ‘I shall have to give up a whole afternoon’s golf.’ And he politely suppressed a sigh.

‘And would that be such a very great misfortune?’ I demanded sarcastically. ‘Lady Marshall has called no less than three times to ask after you, and the least you can do is to go and see her in return. Besides, you always say you admire her so much.’ I was just a wee bit jealous of Lady Marshall, although, of course, I took care not to let Jack discover the fact.

‘I *do* like her,’ he said; ‘I like her very much indeed, but somehow I don’t altogether fancy a ten-mile drive in the present state of my health.’

Now, I knew this to be nothing more nor less

than a paltry excuse. Driving could not possibly have any injurious effect upon Jack's muscles.

'Jack,' I said severely, 'why do you not say at once that you refuse to give up a few hours' personal pleasure for the sake of a neighbour who has invariably been kindness itself to you?'

He coloured. Perhaps he considered my words were capable of a double meaning. At anyrate, that was how I accounted for his blushes.

'What an uncomfortable way you have of putting things,' he remarked.

'I say nothing of my own wishes,' I continued plaintively. 'A ten mile drive is not much more pleasant for me than for you, I suppose. However, that is neither here nor there. I shall order the victoria for half-past two, and leave you to enjoy your precious golf. That is to say,' I added austerely, 'if you *can* enjoy it when your conscience tells you you are shirking your duty.' Once more Jack coloured. There was something on his mind. I imagined that I had carried my point, and that he would end by accompanying me in spite of a little opposition. Therefore I glanced at him mildly,

and said, 'Well, Jack, what is it? I know you want to say something.'

Thus encouraged, he stuttered in return, 'I wonder, Janie dear, if you would be an awful brick and drive yourself in the pony cart. Would you mind?'

'Yes, most decidedly. My fingers get so horribly cold,' I rejoined. 'Besides, if I put on decent clothes, which I must do in order not to look a regular fright in the presence of the incomparable Lady Marshall, it is a nuisance getting them wet should it come on to rain or snow.'

'Oh! then have the victoria, by all means.'

'I propose to take it; that is, if you still decline to come with me.'

'I'll come some other time when I feel more up to the mark. By the way, I daresay you won't object to letting Charles drive instead of Barker?'

'I should object very much,' I said sharply. 'You know how nervous I am on wheels, and I have not the slightest confidence in Charles's driving. He is only a young lad, and has had little or no experience in handling a pair, especially such spirited horses as Beau and Dandy.'

'I feel sure he could manage them all right,' said Jack.



'He might, and he might not. I am hardly prepared to try the experiment. But why cannot Barker drive as usual? Is anything the matter with him?'

'Nothing whatever, but I want him to play golf with me this afternoon. However, of course, if you insist upon taking him, I must stay at home and do nothing.' And Jack's countenance assumed a moody expression.

For a moment I stood and stared at him. Was he in earnest? Yes, that question answered itself by the next words that he spoke.

'It really is rather selfish of you taking Barker away,' he went on to say. 'It would make no difference if Charles went instead, but as I said before, since you make such a point of having Barker, I am prepared to give up. I always do give up,' he muttered in conclusion. Possibly the remark was not intended for my ears, but I overheard it. Now I am proud—proud as Lucifer. In all the nine years of our married life, Jack had never hitherto addressed me in this fashion. If I were selfish, God knows it was not intentional. His words stung me to the quick. A gulf seemed to have opened out between us. We had been so near to one another, and now, I saw a barrier rearing its

dark walls and threatening to destroy our domestic peace. What matter if it were composed of nothing more serious than Silvertown balls, drivers, brassies, lofters, niblicks, mashers, cleeks and putters? it was none the less formidable on that account. I forced back the tears which rose to my eyes. I would not even let him see how deeply my feelings were wounded. If he preferred golf to me, I threw up the sponge. It was useless trying to hold my own any longer. There was something too radically wrong about his composition. The kindest plan was not to regard him as a responsible being. My judgments would be less harsh if I schooled myself into believing that his reason was impaired.

‘Pray do not alter your arrangements on my account,’ I said, after a prolonged pause, speaking in a hard, mechanical voice. ‘It is an unfortunate coincidence that we should both stand in need of Barker’s services. I apologise. No doubt it is odiously selfish of me to prefer a coachman I can trust to one whose driving inspires me with abject terror. You must make allowances. Remember I am only a woman, whereas you enjoy the proud privilege and distinction of being a man. No one would venture to assert that your conduct is egotistical in

making Barker forsake his legitimate duties in order to *pander* to your pleasures.' I placed great emphasis upon the word 'pander.' I was proud of it. It sounded caustic and effective in my ears. Jack flushed scarlet with vexation, and was about to make some rejoinder, but I turned away and refused to listen to what he had to say. Perhaps I had been a bit spoilt up till now, and this new departure came somewhat hard upon me; at all events, I felt terribly sorry for myself. I know that.

## CHAPTER IV

### A COSTLY DRIVE

IT so happened that the horses were peculiarly fresh that day. I had not exaggerated the case when I declared that a lad like Charles was not fit to drive them. Luckily there was no vice about either Beau or Dandy, or I do not know where we should have been. They neither kicked nor reared in harness, but they were exceptionally high-couraged animals, and pulled hard if left in the stable for a day or two. Barker was a first-rate whip, and moreover, they were accustomed to his hands. He always kept them well within themselves, and never allowed them to get beyond control. Charles, on the contrary, drove with an absolutely loose rein, especially down hill. The result may be imagined. The whole way out to Lady Marshall's, my nerves were kept in a state of tension. I implored Charles not to go so fast, but my firm

belief is the horses entirely mastered him. Anyhow, my entreaties proved unavailing to check the speed at which the carriage progressed. We had several hairbreadth escapes, but managed to reach our destination unharmed. Generally, the fresh air does me good, but on this occasion I experienced little or no benefit from it. When I was ushered into Lady Marshall's drawing-room, I trembled like an aspen leaf.

She kissed me effusively on the cheek — why do the women one does not care to leave in the society of one's husband always kiss one, I wonder?—and professed herself delighted to see me.

'But where is Mr Calthorpe?' she inquired, after the usual salutations had been exchanged between us. 'Has he not accompanied you?'

'I left him playing golf,' I replied, with a secret feeling of satisfaction as I noted the disappointment depicted on her ladyship's face.

'The naughty man!' she exclaimed. 'He promised me faithfully that the next time you drove over he would come and see me also.'

I crossed my arms on my lap and gave a tragic sigh. 'Lady Marshall,' I said, 'do you know anything of golf?'

'Nothing whatever,' she responded, surprised at the demand.

'Then let me tell you this: if your male belongings by any chance take to the game, make up your mind as speedily as possible that henceforth they are as good as strangers to you. You will see nothing of them.'

She laughed. 'Oh! come now, Mrs Calthorpe, you are romancing, surely.'

'I am not, I only wish I were. Once upon a time, I flattered myself I had a husband. Now, as far as companionship is concerned, I am utterly bereft.'

'Ah!' she murmured, 'you have always been so singularly lucky.'

I shot a sidelong glance at her. 'It is a common error of most women to imagine that other women are more fortunate in their domestic relations than they are themselves. Occasionally they make a mistake.'

She changed colour. I had not meant the remark in any personal sense, but it was pretty well known in the hunting field that Sir Eustace was far from being a model husband. People were good enough to declare that Lady Marshall cherished a hopeless attachment for Jack. Once, many years ago, they had been

kind of half-engaged. Then had come a quarrel ; I appeared on the scene, and Jack promptly transferred his allegiance. She had never forgiven me. When we met, we were studiously polite to one another. She pitied Jack from the bottom of her heart, and I pitied Sir Eustace quite as sincerely, and opined that he might have proved a more faithful spouse under different conditions. But all this is not to the point.

Lady Marshall wisely took no notice of my remark. She was the last woman in the world to give herself away. She smiled and said, 'So your husband has taken to golf? How glad you must be, dear Mrs Calthorpe, at his having discovered so safe and innocent an amusement. It must make your mind quite easy concerning him. If I remember rightly, you were somewhat given to complaining of his perpetually hanging about the house and having no employment.'

'And do you consider golf an employment?' I asked, with a burst of irrepressible scorn. Her manner irritated me. It always did.

'You forget that I know nothing whatever about it, my dear, and therefore am scarcely competent to give an opinion. Since you wish for one, however, I will drive over some day

soon, and get Mr Calthorpe to initiate me into the mysteries of the game. Do you think I could manage to learn it?’

‘I don’t know,’ I answered impatiently. ‘It would probably depend upon the teacher. If he were to your mind, no doubt then you would exert your natural intelligence, and conquer the difficulties presented by golf. It strikes me as being entirely a man’s game, but I presume that would be no objection?’ She had inferred that I was jealous, so I was determined to give her one in return.

She smiled again, even more finely than before. ‘It would not be an insuperable objection, I admit,’ she said demurely. ‘It is astonishing how quickly one picks up things under competent tuition. Have you tried your hand at the game, dear Mrs Calthorpe?’ And she gave me a vinegary-sweet look.

‘Not I. I detest it. Jack thinks of nothing else. As for conversation—it is golf, golf, golf *ad nauseum*. I used to think hunting talk insipid enough, but it is full of variety, delightful, absorbing, nay, positively intellectual compared with the jargon descriptive of golf.’

‘You are too clever,’ said Lady Marshall, with that everlasting smile of hers. ‘We all



know what men are. The wise woman has to display a certain amount of toleration for their little weaknesses.'

'Even when one despises them thoroughly?'

'Yes; we are never so popular with the lords of creation as when we practise the art of suppressing our private opinions.'

'In other words, you approve of turning yourself into a humbug?'

She shrugged her shoulders. 'It is very difficult to draw the line between humbug and tact. I don't pretend to do it, but, then, I am not gifted enough to look at men and manners from your high, ideal altitude.'

She was sneering at me, as I knew quite well, but I did not condescend to take any notice of her remark. I led the conversation back into a conventional channel, and shortly afterwards rose to take my leave. I was glad to get into the air again. Somehow, I always felt stifled in Lady Marshall's presence. She was one of those women who bring out the worst in people's character. When in her society, I was always at a disadvantage. I had no sooner escaped from her hot and perfumed drawing-room before I began taking myself to task for the way I had behaved.

‘What a fool I am, to be sure, to let her see I was hurt about Jack not coming with me to-day,’ I mused. ‘That woman hates me like poison, and I know it; and yet I am for ever doing or saying something stupid when she is there. I get hot and lose my temper, whilst she says the most acrid things with an air of supreme amiability. I wish to goodness I resembled her in some respects. No, I don’t; she’s a beast, and would give her eyes to take Jack from me, if she could.’

My thoughts were here distracted by the pace at which Charles was driving. The horses had got cold standing still, and now that their heads were once more turned towards home, they were pulling like demons. Charles sat placidly on the box, and made no attempt to moderate their speed. They bowled along at a tremendous rate. Beau was cantering gaily; Dandy set his jaw and trotted in a manner which sent a series of sharp thuds travelling through the body of the victoria. I became alarmed, and cried out to Charles, ‘For any sake, take a pull. I cannot bear going at this breakneck speed.’ But he was not equal to obeying my command. Shortly after leaving Lady Marshall’s house, we came to a steep descent, where the road

had recently been patched with stones. It was mended with rough flints which had not been properly broken up. Barker invariably went leisurely downhill; he was careful of his horses' forelegs. Beau and Dandy were a remarkably handsome pair, and he took great pride in them. We had bought them as four-year-olds, and they had cost us three hundred guineas. They were now in their prime, and Jack had quite lately been offered five hundred for them by a foreign prince resident at Melton for the hunting season. This offer he refused, saying that if they were worth that sum to Prince G——n, they were worth it to him. I admit that the price tempted me, but Jack remained proof against my persuasions. The fact was, he liked being told that he owned the best pair of carriage horses in the county. It pleased his vanity.

Well, we were tearing down the hill, with our animals completely out of hand, when suddenly Beau stepped on a rolling stone and made a desperate peck. Had Barker been on the box, I am persuaded he would have recovered him; but Charles, driving with a loose rein, had not a chance. Beau floundered for a couple of yards, and finally subsided on to his knees with a crash.

Fortunately, he did not roll, and being a very active horse, he almost immediately regained his legs. But, alas! the mischief had been done. I jumped out of the carriage as soon as Charles succeeded in bringing it to a standstill, and to my grief perceived that Beau had broken both his beautiful chestnut knees. The hair was taken clean off, and the right one was so badly cut that the blood flowed freely. Here was a pretty business. I could have cried with vexation, for I knew enough of horses to be aware that this mishap had reduced his value to that of a screw. The knees would be permanently blemished. It was useless upbraiding Charles. He was as sorry as I, but he ought never to have been allowed to drive the pair, since he was totally unfit to occupy the box seat, as I had declared from the first. Indeed, it was a mercy that he had not contrived to upset the whole coach, and that we ourselves had escaped without personal injury. We were forced to perform the remainder of the homeward journey at walking pace, as poor Beau could scarcely raise a trot. By the time we arrived at our destination he was stiff, cold, and terribly lame into the bargain. When I entered the house, Jack greeted me with a smiling visage.

'Hulloa, little woman,' he exclaimed, in a conciliatory manner, 'what a time you have been gone, to be sure. I began to think something had happened.'

'Something *has* happened,' I said sombrely. 'Beau has tumbled down and broken both his knees. Your game of golf has cost you dear. It would have been better had you listened to reason, and let me have Barker.'

Jack pulled a long face. 'That's bad,' he said. 'What the devil was that fool Charles about? I suppose it was all his fault?'

'Not exactly. He knows nothing whatever about driving, as I told you before we started. It is scarcely fair to blame him, because he is absolutely ignorant of the art of driving a pair of high-spirited horses like Beau and Dandy. They were quite out of hand coming down Claughton Hill. You know what a nasty one it is, and to-day it was darned with the most abominable stones. It is a disgrace to put down such flints. Beau stumbled badly whilst we were going along at headlong speed, made a bad peck, tried to save himself, failed and went down. His poor knees are a sight.'

Jack rushed out to the stables before I could enter into more minute details regarding the

accident. He presently returned, looking decidedly glum. He did not say much more just then, but I could see he blamed himself for the occurrence, as well he might. For my part, I could not help hoping it would teach him a lesson. Insensibly, Johnson's words recurred to my mind, 'Where is the game of golf as is worth, etc., etc.?'

During dinner, conversation languished. The disaster had damped our spirits. By way of making myself agreeable after the servants had retired, I asked Jack if he had enjoyed his golf. He brightened up at this fatal question—fatal to my ultimate peace—and seemed entirely to forget the misfortune to his handsome horse.

'Yes, Janie,' he answered, 'we had a ripping game. I'm pretty well dead beat, for Barker and I did no less than three eighteen holes during the course of the afternoon. We played the first game even, and I bested him by four holes. Then we settled that I should give him half a stroke a hole, and we had a most exciting contest. Barker played up, and is improving a lot.'

'Is he?' I said indifferently, for my thoughts were with poor dear Beau, now reduced from his high estate.

'I must get Barker out of his cramped, stilty style of playing,' continued Jack, evidently delighted at finding me in a listening mood, or what he supposed to be one. 'George Donaldson says that the proper swing is everything. Now Barker, although wonderfully accurate in his strokes for a beginner, always seems afraid to let himself out.'

'And who won the second game?' I demanded listlessly; for, to tell the truth, I did not feel vitally interested in Barker's style whilst wielding a club, and cared nothing whether it were cramped or the reverse.

Jack beamed. 'I won,' he said. 'Just fancy, Janie, we were evens up to the last hole; then I had the good luck to make a splendid "putt," and that gave me the game. My ball was over twenty yards from the winning flag at the time.'

'Highly satisfactory,' I remarked ironically, but my irony was thrown away upon my dear, obtuse hubby. He was brimming over with good humour and self-delight. I verily believe that the defeat of Barker afforded him more pleasure than if he had gained a national victory.

'Barker will make a capital player with a little more practice,' went on Jack. 'He is so steady at his approaches, and rarely misses a

"putt" within reasonable distance. He beats me hollow as a rule when once he gets on the green, but I can generally best him at the driving part of the business. By the way, Janie, we made a glorious new bunker this afternoon.'

'Indeed! I am somewhat hazy as to what a bunker is, but no matter—proceed.'

'You know the top field which belongs to Morton? Well, we have got leave from the old fellow to make a green in it, and we go right over the hedge into his field. It takes some doing, I can tell you, but it improves the course wonderfully. We now have a clean run in home.'

'It's rather good of Mr Morton to let you go tramping over his land,' I said.

'Yes, isn't it? He's a regular old brick. I made such a splendid hit this afternoon, Janie. Would you believe it, old lady, I drove all the way from the pond into the stable yard. Was not that extraordinary?'

Marvellous; but I was not aware that you had hoisted a golf flag in the yard. Is that in order the horses should become "enthused" like their master?'

'You little muff! of course not. The direction of the ball was wrong, I admit, but that



does not detract from the hit itself, don't you see?'

'I see that you are on uncommonly good terms with No. 1.'

Jack laughed. 'I don't mind confessing to the wife of my bosom that I am. Somehow or other, during the last day or two I feel as if I were getting on. Just guess what that hit measured.'

## CHAPTER V

### ENGAGING A BUTLER

‘I CAN’T guess,’ I said, in answer to Jack’s words.  
‘I haven’t an idea.’

‘It measured exactly one hundred and seventy yards. Barker and I both paced it in order to make sure. There! what do you think of that?’  
And he turned to me triumphantly, the whole of his honest face broadening under the influence of an expansive smile.

‘I have no doubt it is very good—astonishing, in fact; but you forget that I am not a golfer.’

‘You’ll have to become one, Janie. You’ve no idea what a ripping game it is.’

‘Lady Marshall has announced her intention of coming over one day on purpose to have a lesson. Would you object to teaching her, Jack?’

‘Not in the least. It would be rather fun; not that I am competent to instruct. Her ladyship is as tall as a man, and nearly as

muscular. She ought to make a player. George Donaldson was telling me the other day that he knew a girl up in Scotland who could beat nine men out of ten hollow. She had been brought up close to some golf links.'

'She must be a phenomenon,' I said. 'We do not all enjoy the advantage of being reared near a golf course.'

'By Jove! no,' said Jack, taking my remark quite seriously. 'I wish we did. It's bad luck too for you, Janie, being such a little dot of a thing. One wants a certain amount of height to obtain proper command over the ball. Still, you might play with the children. It's just as much fun if you are all duffers together. That's the beauty of the thing.'

'My ideas of the beautiful don't entirely agree with yours; however, no matter. Besides, if I am never to play well because I am not five feet ten, like Lady Marshall, I prefer not to play at all.'

'One can't expect to excel in everything, you know, Janie.'

'Thank you, Jack, I am aware of the fact. It is for that reason I consider it wiser to stick to those amusements for which I possess some small natural aptitude.'

‘But you have not even tried golf.’

‘No; but I have an innate conviction that only women of the Lady Marshall type can succeed at it. As you truly observed just now, it’s bad luck for me being such a “dot.”’

‘For my part, I like little women,’ said Jack gallantly. ‘Somehow, I never could fancy a grenadier in petticoats. By the way, I want to send a wire the first thing to-morrow morning to the Army and Navy for a supply of new balls. Will you remind me, Janie? You know what a cursed bad memory I have got. I never can remember the smallest trifle.’

‘I will do my best,’ I said. Jack’s memory always amused me. It was one of the most convenient ones I had ever come across. He could remember all that he wanted, but it served as a most comfortable pretext whenever he desired to forget, or else wished somebody else to take trouble on his behalf. I was accustomed to it, and knew that on the present occasion it meant a mute invitation to me to write the letter to the Army and Navy. I admired Jack very much. He was thoroughly consistent. ‘Never do anything yourself,’ he said, ‘if you can get someone else to do it for you.’ And he acted up to his theory. Hither-

to it had worked out well, and he himself did not realise the full extent to which he was dependent upon me and the servants. People sometimes said I spoilt him, but what could I do?

'There is a man at Edinburgh, one Anderson by name,' continued Jack, 'who makes the most splendid bulldogs—'

'The most splendid what?' I interrupted.

'Bulldogs,' he repeated. 'They are a kind of lofter. He makes them on a new principle, I believe, and all the best players are taking them up. I must write for half-a-dozen. It's always useful to have some spare clubs by one.'

I have given this conversation at length, not because of its interest, but because it serves as a fair specimen of those that succeeded it night after night. It soon became impossible to induce Jack to discuss any matter foreign to his beloved golf. He was simply infatuated, and at every meal, regularly as clock work, I had to sit and listen to the same edifying small talk. I longed for a different subject, but no other diverted Jack to the same extent. I soon discovered that if I tried to introduce a fresh topic we gradually but surely reverted to the starting point—golf. There was no getting away from

it. At last I gave up further attempts, realising their uselessness. Henceforth I listened patiently, or impatiently, according to my mood. I endeavoured to resign myself to the situation, for Jack's charge of selfishness continued to fester in my mind. I made heroic efforts not to lay myself open to it in the future. I was not very happy in these days, and sought to console myself by reading scientific books, which taught that human beings have no right to expect happiness in this world, and that we should aim at progress, mental and spiritual, rather than individual content. This was all very well. Perhaps I did improve in some respects, but I would gladly have gone back to the days when Jack cared nothing for golf. The next occurrence that took place in our establishment, although trifling in itself, had its humorous side, and therefore I record it. A little after Beau's accident, a domestic catastrophe arose such as will happen in even the best regulated households. As spring drew near golf proved thirsty work—at least, Jack found it so. It was his habit after playing one round to come indoors, drink a whisky and soda, and rest for a quarter-of-an-hour before beginning operations anew. Now, we had a butler who had been

with us for two years, and whom Jack liked and regarded as a treasure, although I never cared for the man. Suddenly, Jack awoke to the fact that his pet whisky was disappearing with mysterious rapidity. He was the last person to be suspicious—in fact, I always told him he was much too easy-going and trustful. But finally the whisky went so fast that he put a mark upon the bottle. The thief was ignorant, and continued to help himself, with the result that Jack took to watching his treasure and laying little traps for him. He fell into them with the most child-like responsiveness, and one fine day Jack had the satisfaction of catching him decidedly the worse for liquor. We had had so many drunken butlers that, when we engaged Hawley, we told him that at the first sign of inebriety he would lose his place, so he knew what to expect. He subsided into tears, and begged for another trial when Jack gave him a month's warning. We had profited by sad experience, however, and were aware of the uselessness of granting the request, since it merely meant delaying the final verdict at a good deal of personal inconvenience. So Jack took over the key of the cellar, which, in a confiding mood, he had entrusted to

Hawley, and the next thing was to find a successor. Hitherto such matters had invariably been left to me—although, in justice to myself, I did not engage Hawley. Jack got him through the recommendation of a friend. Now he took to poring over the *Morning Post*. At first I could not think what he was about, but I soon discovered that he was studying the advertisement sheet.

‘What are you looking for?’ I inquired, my curiosity being aroused.

‘For servants,’ he replied, much to my surprise. ‘You know, Janie,’ he went on to explain, ‘I’ve come round to think that you were more or less right about Barker. It is rather rough on you my always wanting him to play golf with me. Now, if I could come across a butler who knew something of the game, or even who seemed likely to pick it up, Barker would have a great deal more liberty. They might take it in turns to play.’

I stared at him in amazement.

‘Am I to understand, Jack, that henceforth all our servants are to be engaged, not with regard to their capabilities of performing their duties, but with an eye to their aptitude for golf?’

‘Well—not precisely that,’ he said, looking



somewhat sheepish. 'But there would be no harm if the men-servants could turn their hand to the game.'

'And whilst they are out of doors, who is to do the work?'

'Oh! that will settle itself somehow. The maids can help if necessary.'

'The maids would probably object to doing the butler's duties in order to allow him to play golf.'

At this, Jack got a little irritable.

'Damn it all!' he exclaimed, 'you seem to take a perpetual pleasure in thwarting me.'

The remark was so unjust that I bit my lip and resolved to take no part whatever in the finding of the new treasure. At last Jack hit upon an advertisement to his mind. The advertiser hailed from St Andrews, which place, as everybody knows, is famed for its links. Jack telegraphed, so anxious was he to lose no time. A letter came by return of post, which he declared was highly satisfactory, but which he declined to show to me. I caught sight of the envelope, however, and it was written in a sprawly, uneducated handwriting. The end of the correspondence was that Jack promised to pay the man's expenses from St Andrews if he would come to us to be per-

sonally inspected. He—the butler—had previously stated in a letter that his late master was a great golfer, and that he had frequently been in the habit of accompanying him to the links.

The appointed day arrived, and I could see that Jack was in an unusual state of excitement. He explained his condition by declaring that it was so excessively unpleasant to him changing servants. By dint of a good deal of coaxing, I prevailed upon him to allow me to be present during the interview. He made me solemnly swear first that I would not open my mouth or interfere with him in any way. 'He meant to settle this business by himself.' I was rather cross at being so completely deposed, but at the same time, being extremely curious to see how Jack would conduct himself, and also secretly amused, I gave the desired promise. It was a new sensation feeling like a cypher. I have since grown accustomed to it. A golfer's wife need not expect to have any individuality of her own. She will be ruefully disappointed if she does.

Enter then, if you please, a strapping young man of about six or seven-and-twenty years of age, with a pronounced Scotch accent—which, in mercy to the reader, I will not render, save on special occasions—a shock of red hair and a shrewd, plain,

freckled face. He looked more like a stable helper than an indoor servant. Jack cleared his throat at sight of him, and did not appear to know how to begin the conversation. The man—Sandy Macgregor was his name—stood about a foot from the door, drawn up his full height and as stiff as a poker. The silence was rapidly getting ludicrous. I longed to speak, but would not break my promise. There were so many questions I wanted to put. At length Jack said, 'Oh! ah! I hope you had a pleasant journey south?'

'Yes, sir, thank you, sir, very,' came the reply.

'I think I understood you to say that your late master would give you a good character. He was a golfer, if I am not mistaken?'

'Yes, sir, the Honourable Mr Corrie was one of the finest golfers at St Andrews. He was in the habit of carrying off all the prizes.'

'And why did you leave him?'

Sandy brushed the sleeve of his coat across his white-lashed eyes.

'He left me, sir; he died.'

'Ah! just so, I had forgotten. Did you ever handle a club, by any chance, whilst you were in Mr Corrie's service?' And Jack looked at Macgregor.

'Yes, sir many a time. Whenever the master

was at a loss for someone to play with, he would always make me do a round with him. Ah!' sighing deeply, as if at retrospective pleasures not likely to occur again, 'but it's a grand game!'

'It is indeed,' responded Jack enthusiastically. 'I have only lately taken to it, but in my opinion it beats every other.'

'You may well say that, sir. It stands by itself.'

'Come out into the fields,' said Jack, 'and just let me see how you handle the clubs.' Whereupon they both sallied forth, leaving me to watch their proceedings from the window. Sandy stood straight up to his ball, and with one mighty whack sent it flying clean out of sight. In about ten minutes they returned to the house, and as they entered the hall I could hear Jack saying, 'I think you will suit me very well indeed. I shall expect you to enter the situation immediately; in fact, the sooner the better. Wages? Ah! yes, I was forgetting. The same as you have been having, with everything found? All right. We need not make any bother about that. Anything else?'

'No, sir, nothing, thank you.'

'Then that's settled, By Jove! Sandy, you're a born golfer. I wish I could hit with

such swing and accuracy. It makes me quite jealous.'

'You will come to it all in good time, sir,' responded Sandy, with an indulgent smile. 'It is merely a question of practice.'

'I am inclined to doubt that,' said Jack. 'By-the-bye, I suppose you are familiar with all the usual duties of a butler's place?' He added this as a happy thought. My belief is he had clean forgotten to cross-examine Sandy as to his efficiency in any respect save that of golf.

I could not catch Sandy's reply; and this was how our new butler was engaged.

When Jack re-entered the room I said, 'Why, dear me, Jack, you have not asked the man a single sensible question! Can he clean leathers? Is he accustomed to carve off the table? Is he a good valet? Is he sober and obliging? He may be a perfect ignoramus for all you know.'

'I know this,' rejoined Jack, 'he is, without exception, one of the finest golfers I am likely ever to come across. He made some astonishing drives.'

Then I broke out. 'Jack, I have no patience with you. Really, at your time of life, you ought to have more sense. What connection

can Sandy Macgregor's abilities as a golfer possibly have with his capacity as a butler?'

'Tut!' returned Jack testily, 'any fool can be a butler. It's easy work laying a cloth, answering door bells and eating five hearty meals a day, but it takes a man of intelligence to be a golfer. You may say what you like, but Sandy is a splendid fellow.'

'Time will prove whether he be or not,' I retaliated. I was vexed when I thought of all the things Jack ought to have said and hadn't said.

## CHAPTER VI

### WE GIVE A DINNER PARTY

THREE days later, Sandy entered on his situation, and it did not take me long to discover that the late Mr Corrie's mode of life must have differed very materially from our own. The new butler was willing and good-natured, but totally ignorant. So little, indeed, did he know of his duties, that he went the length of waiving domestic etiquette altogether, and would actually hand us the vegetable dishes himself, if he saw we wanted them, instead of peremptorily motioning to the footman to do so. In justice to Sandy, he was all zeal and attention, and in some respects we fared much better than during the late man's *régime*, but I could not help perceiving that he was sadly lacking in dignity; and dignity in a butler is everything. He has absolutely no prestige without it. The maids liked the new-comer. They said he was an extremely obliging young man, who did not mind putting his hand

to all kinds of odd jobs. This was not surprising, since, by dint of cross-questioning, I ascertained that Sandy, whilst in Mr Corrie's service, had been in the habit of attending to the garden, minding the pigs and fowls and grooming the Honourable's solitary horse, in addition to doing indoor work. In short, he had been brought up in a good school, but there was no denying the fact that he wanted both the manners and appearance, the polished stateliness and stately polish of a high domestic functionary. On the other hand, he quickly established his reputation as a brilliant golfer, and as such Jack held him in reverential esteem. It was useless my pointing out Sandy's shortcomings. Jack resolutely shut his eyes to them. He declared that the new butler was simply invaluable to him as a coach, and that, after playing a few rounds with Sandy, he had already learnt an immense deal about the game. He—Jack—cared for nothing else.

'The man is as good as a professional,' quoth Jack. 'It is astonishing what a lot he knows. Directly I began to drive, he found fault with my style, and told me I should get into a bad habit of hooking if I did not take care.'

'I haven't the remotest idea what hooking is, Jack.'



‘Well,’ he admitted, ‘I don’t understand myself altogether, but from what I can make out, it means not aiming straight when you drive, but depending upon a side wind to carry the ball to the desired point.’

‘And then you get into the way of counting on its always doing so, I suppose?’

‘Exactly; you have hit it to a T. It sounds easy enough, but you would be surprised at the difficulty of putting good advice into execution. According to the great Sandy, if you bring your arms too much round your head when in the act of driving, then the ball is almost bound to hook. There are so many little details to be considered — the shoulders, the position of the legs and feet, the proper method of taking aim, and the various swings required for the different kinds of strokes. I was quite ignorant of them all until Sandy’s advent, and had begun to contract any number of bad habits, which would have proved fatal to my play when I reached a more advanced stage.’

‘Well, dear,’ I observed, ‘I am glad you are so pleased with Sandy, for it is more than I am. He is such a great, ungainly creature.’

‘Why, Janie, what can you possibly have against him? A more willing, hard-working,

young fellow never came inside the house. Even you must admit that.'

'It is true, but all the same, he is not suitable to act as a butler. He cannot keep his footman in order, to begin with. When he insisted last night at dinner on taking the sauce-boat out of William's hand, and bringing it round himself, instead of serving the wine, William had to run out of the room in order to conceal his laughter. He went into fits.'

'The more fool he!' ejaculated Jack petulantly. 'Sandy is worth a hundred of him. The boy is a born idiot.'

'And Sandy has the advantage of being a born golfer,' I retorted. 'I really fail to perceive much difference between the two.'

'Jane, you mischievous imp, you only say that so as to aggravate me.'

'John, you irascible Goliath, should I not be more than foolish to go out of my way to achieve such a result, when it is so easily obtainable without the smallest effort on my part?'

Jack laughed. He was amused at the retort.

'My difficulty is this,' I continued. 'I have asked some people to dinner next Tuesday. We shall be fourteen in all, and I positively dread what Sandy will say and do on the occasion. He

is so exceedingly unconventional, and has such an extraordinary habit of joining in the conversation. He seems to take a delight in giving out his opinions, but it is not quite the thing.'

'That's Scotch,' remarked Jack. 'For my part, I resemble our revered Sovereign, and prefer the bluff, outspoken honesty of a northerner to the smooth-tongued, oily deceit of the southerner.'

'But there is etiquette to be considered in this world, Jack.'

'Now, Jane, would you rather have a quick, observant fellow, who runs about and hands you all you want at table, or a pompous old fool, who does nothing but stand behind your chair and inflate his shirt front? You might starve ere he would budge from his position. He remains immovable, and commands his subordinates by solemn frowns and winks.'

I could not help smiling. There was a considerable amount of truth in Jack's statement. Seeing he had gained an advantage, he went on to say, 'I agree with you that Sandy is not exactly conventional, but what does it signify? He is useful and willing, and will soon learn the duties of his position. For my own part, I find him a regular treasure.'

‘You thought Thomson one until you found him out,’ I remarked drily.

Jack made a grimace. ‘I prefer to think well rather than badly of my fellow creatures,’ he said. ‘It is pleasanter, on the whole.’

‘Undoubtedly,’ I agreed. ‘Then your advice is, risk the dinner party, and give Sandy a trial? I was seriously thinking of writing to put the people off.’

‘There is not the slightest reason for doing so. It would be a pity.’

‘The Mackintoshes are such a particular couple,’ I mused. ‘She picks holes with everything wherever she goes, and apparently only dines out for the pleasure of finding fault. I confess I rather dread her.’

‘We cannot help it if the unfortunate woman is cursed with a temperament which makes her look at the whole world through black-tinted spectacles,’ said Jack. ‘Have your dinner party by all means. I’ll be bound that, with a little preliminary coaching from you, who are so good at that sort of thing, Sandy will go through the ordeal with flying colours.’

Not a ‘little’ coaching, but a great deal, did Sandy receive before the appointed day. I told him exactly what he had to do—how it was

his place to usher the guests into the drawing-room, announcing their names in an audible voice; how, when dinner was on the table he must proclaim the fact; and how, having engaged extra waiters to help from the nearest town, it would be his special duty to preside at the carving table and take charge of the wine. All this, and much more, I dinned into his ears. He listened to my various remarks with such an air of grave and respectful attention that I flattered myself I had made quite an impression. To make assurance doubly sure, however, I took the precaution to write down my instructions in a legible hand, and told Sandy that, in the event of his memory playing him false, he had nothing to do but refer to the written injunctions. Some butlers would have taken offence at being treated in this unceremonious fashion, but Sandy remained perfectly good-humoured, and it was a consolation to feel that I could say what I liked to him. He had no pride to hurt, which was a mercy. Indeed, he seemed so grateful for the numerous hints I gave him, that my heart was quite softened by his humility and anxiety to give satisfaction. I began to think that, perhaps, Jack might be right after all; and I believe to

this hour that matters would have gone off well had it not been for his intervention.

On the afternoon of the important day, whilst Sandy was busy laying the cloth under my supervision, Jack popped his head in at the dining-room door and said, 'Sandy, I want you to play a game of golf with me. You can manage a round, can't you?'

Sandy's face lit up in a moment, and it was easy to tell which way his inclinations lay. To his credit, he made no immediate response, but looked dubiously towards me. Before he had time to consider his answer, I said, 'No, Jack, you cannot possibly have Sandy to-day. You must make up your mind to do without him for once in a way. He is much too busy. Why not take Barker? He is doing nothing this afternoon, and will not be wanted.'

'I've got him already,' said Jack. 'He is waiting outside. The fact is, Janie, Whinyard Jones has just driven over, and we want Sandy badly to make up a foursome. I would not have begged for him otherwise.'

'Bother Whinyard Jones!' I exclaimed. 'What brings him here to-day of all days, I should like to know? The man has not been near us for ages.'

'I invited him to come,' Jack confessed, somewhat sheepishly; for I had particularly requested him to leave us free on this eventful afternoon. 'The truth is,' he said apologetically, 'I forgot all about the blessed dinner party to-night. It clean went out of my head. Whinyard has come a long distance. I admit that his presence is rather unfortunate, but since he is here, we must make the best of it. Come, wife,' he concluded coaxingly, 'surely you can spare us Sandy for an hour. It sha'n't be longer, I promise.'

'If it were only for an hour,' I said doubtingly, for Jack is hard to resist when he pleads. 'But I know what you two are when once you set to work at golf. You lose all count of the time, and it won't do for Sandy to get behindhand to-day; whatever,' I added severely, 'he may do on ordinary occasions. Things must be ready, do you hear?'

Sandy coloured up to the ears at this observation, but the end of the discussion was, Jack carried him off in triumph. The footman, the upper housemaid and myself were left to ornament the dinner table, arrange the glass, silver, flowers, etc. I did not mind the exertion for once, although I secretly felt that entertaining my

neighbours would rapidly degenerate into a burden were this state of affairs to prove of frequent occurrence.

I presume the gentlemen had a good long game, or several, for, in spite of Jack's promise, they did not re-enter the house until five o'clock. As may be imagined, I was in a fuming condition. Even then, they shut themselves up in Jack's smoking-room, and almost immediately there arose a brisk demand for whiskies and sodas. I could hear the order being given. Sandy attended to his master. When at length he reappeared in the dining-room, his face was flushed and his eye sparkled. I more than suspected that, following the example of his superiors, he had also refreshed himself with a taste of his national beverage. Fortunately it takes a good deal, as a rule, to go to a Scotchman's head. I noticed that he carried a wooden bowl full of dirty Silverton balls in his hand.

'What are you doing with those nasty things?' I demanded, in a tone of some asperity, for I felt decidedly aggrieved by the proceedings.

Sandy thereupon deposited the wooden bowl on the lower ledge of the dinner waggon. He turned round and faced me awkwardly.



'The master has ordered me to whiten the balls for to-morrow's play,' he said.

'Well, you can't whiten them now,' I responded 'so what is the use of bringing them in here? They are only in the way. It is past five o'clock,' I went on, 'and William and I have laid the table in your absence to the best of our ability. Now that you have at *last*,' laying a great stress upon the word, 'returned to your rightful duties, I shall retire.' So saying, I marched towards the door. I felt both worried and fatigued, and was glad to effect an escape. On the way out, my eye once more chanced to light on the golf balls.

'Sandy,' I reiterated, 'don't forget to take that horrid bowl away before dinner time. Put it in the boot hole, or anywhere out of sight.'

'Yes, ma'am,' he said, with a pleasant smile, 'I'll not forget. You may make your mind quite easy.' That was the worst of Sandy. He was always amiable, and it seemed as if nothing could ruffle his serenity. No matter how cross I might be, he invariably smiled benignly on me in return. He did not condescend to notice my childish humours, and often made me feel quite vixenish by force of contrast. And yet I prided myself on never finding fault without

reason. Nevertheless, it was useless chiding such an absurd creature. He was a golfer, pure and simple. It is unnecessary to say more. If any other mistress of an establishment happens to have a golfing butler in her employ, she will realise the difficulties with which I had to contend. It did not matter what errors Sandy committed, Jack was ever ready to make excuses for him. In order to keep things going in any kind of working condition, I had an uphill game to play. All the men save Johnson were against me. I stood alone. On the present occasion, I went upstairs to my room to dress for the evening. I had just concluded that somewhat arduous operation, and stood before the glass fastening my bracelets, when a loud knocking was heard at the door. It made me jump, for somehow my nerves were not in their usual trim.

‘Who is there?’ I called out.

‘It’s me, ma’am,’ responded Sandy’s voice.

‘Goodness gracious! you can’t come in. What do you want now?’

‘The wine, ma’am. The master has forgotten to put it out. He’s downstairs fast asleep in his armchair, and I dunno like to wake the puir mon from his slumbers. It is just fatigued he is after his golf, and he’s sleeping like an infant.’

'Forgotten to put out the wine!' I exclaimed in consternation. 'How exceedingly tiresome of him. The people will be here in ten minutes from now.' More ruthless, and possibly less tender-hearted than Sandy, I rushed to the smoking-room, and, as our butler had said, found Jack peacefully snoring in the armchair. Being angry with him, I had not the slightest compunction, and shook him vigorously by the arm.

'Wake up, you great, lazy man,' I cried, with wifely frankness. 'I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself. It is half-past seven o'clock, and you are not even dressed. I declare I have no patience with you; it is too bad.'

Jack yawned, stretched himself, then, realising the situation, had the audacity to catch my hand and kiss it. But I was not to be pacified thus.

'Really,' I burst out, 'your behaviour is past a joke. Here have I been working like a slave all the afternoon, and tiring myself to death in order that you might have Sandy to play with you at that everlasting golf, although I am sure it would not have made any difference missing one day; and now, when everything ought to be in readiness for your guests, he

comes to me at the eleventh hour and says that you have not even put out the wine. No wonder I am annoyed. Don't kiss my hand like that,' snatching it away from his grasp. 'I'm not a child, to be soothed by a few meaningless caresses.'

Jack arose from the chair, looking rather penitent and foolish.

'Upon my word, Janie,' he said, 'I'm awfully sorry. The wine entirely escaped my memory. I'll go down to the cellar this instant.'

'The champagne won't be properly iced,' I said regretfully, thinking of the half-hundred-weight of ice for which I should have the pleasure of paying. 'It can't. There won't be time.'

'Thank goodness it's a pretty cold evening,' he said cheerfully. 'Let us devoutly hope that the temperature of the champagne will escape being commented upon.'

'Now, Jack, do promise me to make haste, and dress as quickly as possible. Hark! there are wheels already, and you and Sandy will be fiddling about together in the cellar, instead of being able to receive the company properly. It's enough to put a saint out,' and I stamped my foot upon the floor.

'And you, my darling, with all your virtues,

are not exactly what one might call a saint,' said Jack, a trifle sarcastically. Then, in his usual good-humoured manner, he added, 'All the same, Janie, I would not exchange you with one. You look awfully nice, dear. Is that a new frock you have on?'

'No, sir, it is not. You have seen it dozens of times before.'

'Have I? It's an uncommonly becoming one, and suits you down to the ground. Do you know, Janie, you look like a little French marquise, so dainty and trim. I wish,' with a fine smile, 'that Lady Marshall were coming here to-night. She could not hold a candle to you. Come, kiss and make friends, there is a good little woman.'

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RESULT OF A GOLF-MAD DOMESTIC

I DARESAY it was weak of me. I have no doubt but what I displayed a lamentable want of character, and also an immense amount of female vanity and susceptibility to praise, but Jack's words completely disarmed my wrath. His approbation was very precious to me, although I thought it the proper thing to conceal the fact as much as possible. When he made disparaging mention of Lady Marshall's name, I was fairly conquered. We embraced like a fond and foolish couple, and I, for one, felt lighter and better tempered after the operation. When I entered the drawing-room, I was happier than I had been for many days past. Whatever might be Jack's peculiarities, I felt sure of his love. 'Like a little French marquise, so dainty and trim,' I kept saying to myself. Then I stood on tip-toe on the fender stool, and surveyed my reflection in the glass. It was nice to know that

Jack thought I looked well, and that, after nine years of matrimony, he was still capable of admiring his own wife rather than somebody else's. I smiled complacently at my image, and was very nearly caught in the act, for just at that moment the door was thrown open, and, Sandy being occupied with Jack, Sir Talbot and Lady Constable were announced by William. I jumped guiltily from the fender stool, and advanced to meet them with one of those artificial smiles which it is the bounden duty of every polite hostess to conjure up by way of greeting.

'So glad to see you. How kind of you not to mind such a long drive,' I murmured. 'The roads are so bad, too, just at present; there is no getting along.' After exchanging some customary platitudes, as a matter of course, we sought refuge in the weather. Whenever and wherever two or three English men and women are gathered together, the meteorological conditions of the hour are invariably the leading topic of conversation. It is not so much on account of their interest, as that they form a safe and convenient means of introducing other subjects. For quite five minutes we plodded gallantly on at rain and snow, and mud and damp and north-east winds. The latter affected Lady Constable's liver, it

transpired, and also Sir Talbot's temper. Both considered themselves peculiarly aggrieved by the other's infirmity. *He* complained of her possessing such an upsetting thing as a liver; *she* of his having a temper.

'You know, my dear Mrs Calthorpe,' said the lady, addressing herself to me for sympathy, 'I have a perfect horror of north-east wind, not only on my own account, but also on Sir Talbot's. No need for me to inquire from what quarter it blows. My husband is as good as any weather-cock. Set him at north-east, and the whole household becomes aware of the fact. It is astonishing how it affects him. He is cross, peevish, out of sorts—'

'Stuff and nonsense,' interrupted the worthy baronet. 'The real truth is, her ladyship is full of fads and fancies. That comes, I suppose,' and he sighed deeply, 'of indulging in a liver. Whenever she begins talking about the cold, clay soil, says the damp penetrates to her bones, and vows that the climate of England is slowly killing her, then I know for certain that the wind is north-east. Just as if anyone could wish for more,' he wound up by saying, 'than to live in the finest hunting county in Great Britain.'



'Only when you do not happen to hunt, and must be content with hearing about all the delights of the chase—' I ventured to remark.

'Then you ought to hunt,' rejoined the fine old Nimrod energetically. 'I would buy my wife the most perfect weight-carrier in the kingdom to-morrow, if only I could persuade her to mount a horse. We should hear no more nonsense about liver and clay soil then. Women, when they get to a certain age, want exercise. They do not take half enough, as a rule, to keep themselves in health, and then they go in for blaming their surroundings.'

Lady Constable, who weighed over sixteen stone, groaned aloud. She held up her plump, jewelled hands in pious horror.

'Hunt!' she exclaimed. 'Me hunt! A respectable British matron, with grown-up sons and daughters. No, thank you; I should be ashamed to look my children in the face. There is a time for all things.' And she agitated her fan with righteous indignation. Sir Talbot burst into a hearty fit of laughter, and the entry of another couple put an end to a conversation which was becoming spirited on both sides. By the time Master Jack put in an appearance the room was quite full. I

began to think that he never was coming, and, with so many people on my hands to entertain, felt rather overweighted. It was a great relief when, at last, he strolled into the apartment. We were now all assembled, and I secretly longed for the advent of dinner. The period which precedes it is always one of strain to the entertainers of the guests. Its announcement was delayed in the most agonising manner. Of course, I knew that Jack, forgetting to put out the wine and only getting dressed at the last moment, had sadly interfered with Sandy's arrangements. Unfortunately, it was not easy to make full explanations to our friends, who sat and hungered. They were very good, and did their best to keep up a running fire of small remarks, but every minute added to the effort. We were all conscious of it, and, no doubt, they wondered when they were going to get something to eat. The majority had been out hunting, and, having had a hard day, naturally looked forward to their dinner. At length, Heaven be praised! it was announced, precisely five-and-thirty minutes after the proper time. I heaved an inward sigh of thankfulness, for during the latter half of this period I had literally sat on thorns, and had

twice despatched Jack to the lower regions, with injunctions that haste should be made. I was delighted beyond measure when Sandy popped his red head unceremoniously in at the drawing-room door and proclaimed the welcome intelligence that our evening meal was served. By the way, he pronounced the word 'sairved.' It sounded comical in my ears.

Thanks to a good cook and a liberal bill of fare, the repast went off without any noticeable hitch. I kept my eye constantly on Sandy. He committed several mistakes, but, owing to the promptitude and good sense of William, who luckily forgot to be amused, they were so quickly retrieved as to be scarcely perceptible. At first, the talk was almost exclusively of horses and hunting, but, as the meal proceeded we became golfy as usual. Jack worked round by degrees to his favourite subject. He could not abstain from it for long at a time. He did not care to hear about the wonderful fences other people had jumped, when he himself was debarred from joining in the chase. It was astonishing how his interest had waned since his accident. He even confided to me, later on, that purely hunting conversation was decidedly boring: whereat I smiled. Poor

dear! He never considered the effect his perpetual golf jargon produced upon me. It was a regular case of the mote and the beam. I held my peace, however. For my own part, I infinitely preferred hearing about astounding feats of valour in the field to absolutely safe deeds of prowess performed on the greens. I could understand the excitement of the one, but not of the other, which seemed to me tame in the extreme. But everyone to his taste. Perhaps it is as well we do not all agree, otherwise there would be too great a rush on the particular pastime we happen to fancy.

By the time we got to the ices, Jack was in full swing, expatiating volubly on the extraordinary merits of the game, and urging his friends, male and female, to commence it without delay. In the expansion of his heart, he invited them in a body to play upon his ground, whenever and as often as they chose. I foresaw the conversion of our humble little fields into a public course. Henceforth, anyone who liked was to come marching up our drive, and privacy would be completely a thing of the past. We were to be turned into a golfing community, possessing all rights and privileges

in common. I confess that I did not altogether relish the prospect.

If Jack could be believed, hunting was mighty tame work in comparison with iron play and approaches. King Horse and King Fox had found a rival at last. They were to be deposed from their pedestal, and Golf was to take their place. All this according to the gospel of St John. The audience listened with varied feelings. Some were indulgent, some sarcastic, some obdurately sceptical. Meanwhile, Sandy's Caledonian countenance glowed with approbation.

A close observer might have detected that he seconded Jack's encomiums heart and soul. The man was all agog, drinking in every word of the conversation and totally absorbed by it. In his excitement, he neglected to hand round the dessert. I beckoned him to my side by an imperceptible gesture, and whispered that he should immediately cut up the pineapple. Jack continued to discourse upon golf. I sincerely trust that the dear, good, obtuse fellow did not bore his guests as he did me. Fortunately, they possessed one advantage. The subject was new to them, whereas, in my case, the charm of novelty had long since ceased. I do not wish

to complain, but the constant repetition of the same theme, especially when it happens to be one in which you take no interest, is wearisome in the extreme. I rejoiced that, for once, Jack had other listeners, and that my undivided attention was not essential. Meanwhile, Jack's voice dwarfed all others. In an abstracted kind of way, every now and again, I became conscious of such familiar expressions as niblicks, lofters, brassies, slicing, pressing, gobbling, etc., when suddenly my attention was claimed by a question from Sir Talbot, who occupied a seat on my right-hand side.

'Eh!' he exclaimed. 'Pineapple? Why, what is this, my dear madam? A new and rare fruit grown on the matchless Calthorpe Greens?' And he laughed so uproariously that I seriously thought he would have a fit.

Reader! imagine my consternation. What do you think that terrible Sandy had done? He was calmly handing round the bowl of dirty, Silvertown balls, saying cheerfully as he did so, 'Pineapple, if you please?'

I gave him *such* a look. If I could have annihilated him on the spot, I verily believe I would have done so. The wretched man caught my eye, and not till then did he discover his

mistake. For a moment he appeared somewhat abashed, especially as a great guffaw of merriment arose at his—or rather our expense. The next, the general hilarity served to put him on his mettle. His face flushed a bright crimson, and, drawing himself up to his full height, he addressed the assembled company in his broadest Scotch accent.

‘Indeed,’ he said, ‘the conversaishun was just all aboot golf, and a more interaisting subject the mind of man canna conceive. It mounted into my brain like, and laid powerful hold of me, so that somehow it cam’ quite natural to hand roun’ the balls. No offence, ladies and gentlemen, but ye may tak’ my word for it, golf is the very graandest game that was ever invented.’

This speech was hailed with another great roar of laughter, in which Jack joined. At last he managed to control his mirth by an effort, and said,—

‘Come, shut up, Sandy. This is neither the time nor the place for giving us your opinions. We do not care to hear them at present.’

I raised my forefinger to my forehead, and, turning to Sir Talbot, said significantly, ‘You see they are both crazed. Master and man—there is nothing to choose between them. Take

my advice—the advice of a victim. Don't catch the fever; stick to your horses and dogs. If you do, your unfortunate belongings will never know a moment's peace for the rest of their days.'

Jack resented this remark, but I did not mind; and with a few more parting shots to the same effect, I made the signal to rise from table. Gathering the ladies together, I left the scene of my humiliation. For it was a scene of humiliation to me. I could not laugh the matter off lightly as Jack did. For the time being I felt hopelessly disgraced. By to-morrow the story would be all over the county. It would be known that we offered uncleanly golf balls to our neighbours in lieu of dessert. And I, who had always been famed for my dinners, and for doing people, what they were pleased to call—well! Faugh! I could have pommelled Sandy's red head. One thing was certain—the man would have to go. After to-night's fiasco, even Jack would surely recognise the necessity of giving him warning. He was not fit to be a butler. Nature had designed him for a professional golfer. In that capacity, or as a green-keeper, or even as the humbler caddie, no doubt, he would have done admirably. He had every desirable qualification for such posts, but as the



head servant of a gentleman's establishment, he had missed his vocation. With all his good points, he did not do. On this point my mind was made up. To-morrow he should be presented with a month's wages, and kindly, but firmly, requested to return to St Andrews. There he was in his element. Pity that he had ever seen fit to remove from it. Amid golfy surroundings alone was he capable of appearing to advantage. For menial and domestic work he had no disposition, in spite of a certain amount of good will. His talents lay altogether in another direction. On the following day Jack and I had one of the most serious quarrels—if not *the* most serious—that had ever taken place between us during the whole nine years of our wedded life. Need I say that Sandy directly, and that detestable golf indirectly, were the causes of our falling out?

After breakfast I invaded Jack's smoking-room and opened fire. So convinced was I on the present occasion of the righteousness of my cause, that I never even contemplated defeat. It seemed to me there could be no excuse for Sandy's conduct of the previous evening, and that Jack would naturally see matters in the same light as I did myself. He, Sandy, had publicly disgraced

us, and by so doing had conclusively proved his unfitness to remain in our situation. Jack had just lit up a pipe when I entered the room. Why do idle men invariably light up pipes immediately after breakfast, I wonder? Is it because they can find nothing better to do? My lord and master was reposing his athletic limbs in a capacious arm-chair, and making pretence to turn over the leaves of a newspaper which he held in his hand. I imagined the moment to be eminently propitious, and so went boldly to the attack without a second's hesitation.

'Jack, dear,' I said, 'I want to have a word with you about last night.'

He assumed a more erect position. 'All right, Janie,' he said good-temperedly. 'What about last night? It struck me that everything went off remarkably well. The dinner was most admirably cooked. You can congratulate Markham on her performances. She outshone herself.'

'Yes, Markham sent up a very good dinner. I do not know where we should have been had she failed us. The cooking was the one redeeming point.'

'That *entrée* with lobsters and truffles was quite first rate,' said Jack. 'I have not tasted

anything so excellent for a long time. All it wanted to be absolute perfection was ice. It would have been even better iced than hot, at least in my opinion.'

'People don't care about cold *entrées* so early in the year,' I rejoined. 'However, I am glad that you were pleased with Markham and the new dish. I am only distressed that Sandy did not prove equally satisfactory.'

Jack's countenance took on a comical expression. I think he was inclined to laugh, but suppressed his mirth in deference to my tragic tone of voice.

'Sandy made a bit of mistake, I admit,' he said, 'but, after all, when one comes to think of it, it was an extremely natural one.'

'If you do not object to being made a laughing stock of, and furnishing amusement to the whole of the county,' I retorted, 'I do, most strongly.' And with considerable difficulty I restrained an inclination to weep.

'Tut! you little women are so curiously small-minded, and make such ridiculous mountains out of molehills.'

The remark roused my spirit.

## CHAPTER VIII

### JACK AND I FALL OUT

'I DO not agree with you, Jack,' I returned, 'and I fail to perceive in what way I am more narrow-minded than yourself.'

'Sandy made a fool of himself during dessert—granted,' said Jack. 'What then? The consequences were not very serious. We had a good laugh at his expense. Surely there's an end of the matter,' and Jack buried himself in the newspaper, as if wearied of the subject. I could feel my colour rising as well as my temper. The carelessness and apparent levity with which he treated the affair had an irritating effect upon my nerves. I was still smarting from what, rightly or wrongly, I conceived to be our disgrace. I had come to Jack for sympathy, and was exasperated by receiving a repulse. At this distance of time, I can see that it was both foolish and childish of me to attach so much importance to a trifle, but at

the moment I was far too mortified to perceive that it was one. Therefore I replied, with more spirit than tact,—

‘Exactly, Jack ; what you say is quite true. There is an end of the matter. I am delighted to find you in so reasonable a mood.’

He laughed complaisantly. ‘I flatter myself, Madam Jane, that I am always in a reasonable mood. You are the firebrand as a rule.’

‘You enjoy it,’ I responded. ‘You would hate a woman who always agreed with everything you said, and treated you as a false idol. There is nothing worse for a man. It makes him conceited, arbitrary, and ruins his character.’

‘I ought to be very much obliged to you, Janie, since there is not much chance of my character being ruined. All the same, I fancy I should appreciate a little wifely adoration, just by way of a change. It might pall after a time, but still there would be a certain novelty about it.’

‘You should not have married me if you hanker after a pedestal. I would not condescend to make a false idol of any man.’

Jack laughed again. He has such a pleasant, mellow laugh. I know no other laugh that possesses the same knack of disarming wrath.

Nevertheless, to-day it failed in its usual effect. I steeled myself against it, and would not unbend a hair's breadth. I persuaded myself that dignity demanded a firm attitude. Being short of stature, I was always standing on dignity.

'You are such a quaint, little person,' Jack went on to say, 'and, somehow or other, I rather like you, in spite of all your tantrums. They amuse me.'

'Thank you, sir. *Rather* is a term whose strength and potency honours your humble servant in the extreme. I presume that you *rather* like a good many people—Lady Marshall, for instance?'

'Oh! bother Lady Marshall. Why the deuce are you always thrusting that woman's name down my throat?'

'Because I fancy that it is agreeable to you.'

'No it is not; quite the reverse. Come, Janie, I'm busy. What do you want?'

'Busy!' I scoffed. 'May I venture to inquire if lolling at full length in a capacious arm-chair, and smoking a nasty, smelly pipe constitute your business?'

'I am reading the newspaper, or trying to do so,' he sighed in return.

'Look here, Jack, let this be distinctly understood. You will not read the newspaper, or even try to do so, as long as I am in the room, and it pleases me to talk to you. Do you wish to insult my powers of conversation?'

He threw aside the paper with an air of injured resignation. I knew I was boring him, and took a malicious delight in the fact.

'All right,' said Jack, 'let us have a chat, since you insist upon it. One consolation is, the leading articles are infernally slow this morning. Your small talk is perhaps preferable.' And he eyed me with marital indulgence.

'I do not want to "small talk." On the contrary I wish to be serious—'

'Can you? That is the question,' he interrupted.

'Yes, sir, I can. The doubt is discourteous, and as such I resent it. I came here with the intention of saying a few words with reference to Sandy.'

'Have we not had more than a few already?' he demanded.

'Sandy will have to go, of course,' I went on, unheeding the observation. 'To be brief, I propose giving him warning this morning. I thought I would just mention my intention to you first.' And I clasped my hands together.

Jack's face grew suddenly grave. The sunniness died out of it. He gave a long, low whistle. There was silence for a moment between us—the hostile silence which heralds a storm. When he spoke, his voice had an accustomed ring in it. I realised that I had raised a hornet's nest about my ears, but I was too much in earnest to withdraw from the position I had taken up.

'*You* propose to give Sandy warning,' he said. 'Are you aware that this is my house, and that I am master in it?'

'Perfectly,' I responded, incensed by the question. 'At the same time, I beg to remind you that I am the mistress, possessed of equal rights and authority within her own department.' I was not going to be put down and trampled on, not I. Master Jack should have as good as he gave.

'Janie,' he said, 'when you answer me in that fashion, it makes me think you have been spoiled by over-indulgence, and too much of your own way.'

'And if I have, whose fault is it?' I retaliated. 'We have been married nine years. During that time, who has managed everything both inside and outside the place, you or I?'

'You, I suppose,' he admitted grudgingly.



'Precisely. I have paid gardeners, helpers, servants, bills of every description. It was all left for me to settle.'

'With my money,' he said feebly.

I cast a look of scorn at him. 'Yes,' I said, 'with your money. It is kind and generous of you to remind me of the fact. I have none of my own—not a farthing. You proposed to a pauper, and I made what the world is pleased to call "a good match." You must take the consequences.'

'Have I not willingly done so? Why are you bringing all this up, Janie?'

'If you complain of my having too much my own way,' I went on excitedly, 'why did you not look after matters yourself, and take a little trouble in the beginning? Power inevitably slid from your hands.'

'Perhaps you are right,' he said thoughtfully. 'It never struck me in that light before. Besides, you managed so cleverly.'

'Then let it strike your old dunderhead now. The truth is, you were too lazy to exert yourself. All worry, all responsibility was shuffled off your shoulders on to mine. When I tried to consult you, you said you did not care what happened so long as you were not bothered.'

This method of procedure was convenient and easy. I do not attempt to deny its advantages, but there were certain drawbacks connected with it which you overlooked. You ended by becoming a puppet—a mere cypher. Contradict me if you can.'

I was thoroughly roused, and did not hesitate to speak out more plainly than was probably circumspect. The words of reproach came swiftly to my tongue. Jack drew a deep breath, like one who has suddenly been immersed in ice-cold water. My arrows of sarcasm had hit the target.

'No,' he said presently, 'I cannot contradict you. What you say is true, although you put it coarsely and with a fine disregard for my feelings. Even puppets have them, you know,' he concluded bitterly.

'You need not be a puppet,' I rejoined, regretting the remark.

'Another truism, Jane, for which I beg to tender my thanks. As you truly observe, there is not the slightest occasion for me to remain a cypher in my own house. I intend to be so no longer. Your friendly and obliging irony has enlightened my ignorance. I am very much obliged to you.'

'I am pleased to have rendered such good

service, Jack, especially if you profit in the future by my remarks.'

'How could I fail to do so, when they are so charged with common sense and kindness? I thank you very much indeed, my dear, since you have clearly shown me this morning that too much authority has been vested in your hands. Power is bad for a woman. I begin to understand my mistake.'

'You begin to understand your mistake!' I echoed irately. 'You talk as if I had committed a crime. With what do you charge me?'

'With nothing; only it may, perhaps, be better for all parties if I undertake the administration of my own household. As you very properly say, it is hardly fair shuffling all the responsibility on to your shoulders.'

'You have grown wonderfully considerate all of a sudden,' I sneered.

He reddened. 'Poor little shoulders,' he said, in a pitying tone, which almost made me forget my dignity. 'They are not very broad, Jane.'

'They have had to bear a good deal all this time,' I said doggedly. 'You seem to forget that the errors of years are not to be repaired in a day.'

'That, unfortunately, is true,' said Jack. 'Never-

theless, I propose turning over a new leaf, and it may possibly save unpleasantness hereafter, if I tell you plainly that henceforth it is my intention to take over the entire management of the men-servants. You will be relieved of that part of your—or rather my duties.'

'Thank goodness,' I exclaimed satirically. 'You need not imagine that you are depriving me of any enjoyment. They are more bother than they are worth.'

'That is a feminine statement, which conveys nothing to the intelligent male mind,' said Jack loftily. 'Under the new *régime* which I propose inaugurating, it is I, and not you, who will give them warning.'

'Then, Jack, you will speak to Sandy yourself, and get rid of the odious creature? We cannot possibly keep him. Everything will be at sixes and sevens if you are foolish enough to insist on doing so.'

'I will speak to Sandy, certainly,' said Jack, 'and tell him to be more careful the next time we have company. But as for getting rid of him,' rising from the arm-chair and standing in a determined attitude, with his back resting against the mantel-piece, 'I have not the smallest intention of doing so.'

The blood rushed hot through my veins. 'Is it permitted to inquire why not?' I demanded, vainly striving to steady my voice.

'Most certainly. Sandy is much too useful to me individually. As a coach at golf he is simply invaluable. If I engaged a hundred men, I should not find one to take his place, that's quite sure.'

'Then is everything to give way to golf in future?'

'Listen to me for once, Jane. All things in this life are a compromise. If you insist on having another butler, I undertake to find one, and in that case would keep Sandy on as a supernumerary. He might valet me and do odd jobs about the place; but part with him I won't.'

'We do not want another man in the house,' I objected. 'He would only be a fearful nuisance.' I was a little awed by Jack's manner, which was entirely new. Never had I seen him so alert, so determined. He seemed transformed.

'No,' he said, 'I don't suppose we do actually want a third man. He would be a considerable extra expense. At the same time, I am willing to incur the additional outlay if it will afford you the least satisfaction.'

‘How could it? If I had my own way, I would never have anything but parlour-maids. So you really mean to keep Sandy on, and put up with all his funny, muddly ways?’

‘For the present, yes. Besides, he will improve.’

‘And you do not care in the slightest what my feelings in the matter are?’

‘I will not go so far as to say that, but your feelings are exaggerated, as you will acknowledge on reflection. In common justice, Janie, it is absurd to give a man warning simply because he happens to make one mistake.’

‘One!’ I exclaimed impatiently. ‘He makes hundreds.’

‘He will rectify them by degrees. He is thoroughly well-meaning and honest, which, after all, is the great thing. I do not know that it is necessary to prolong this discussion. You look flushed and heated, my dear. Perhaps you had better retire for a little, in order to regain your usual serenity.’

‘Jack,’ I burst out, ‘you are simply detestable. When you assume that tyrannical tone, I positively hate you.’

‘Hush! Janie,’ he said. ‘Don’t let your temper get the better of your discretion. You may hate me, but as I happen to be your

husband, and we neither of us can conveniently untie the matrimonial noose, it is more politic on either side to conceal the fact. Self-interest demands its suppression.'

'How dare you talk to me like that? You know quite well that it is not in my nature to sham and pretend.' And I turned scarlet with indignation.

'You need neither sham nor pretend, but you can maintain a dignified silence.' There was a twinkle in Jack's eye as he said these words which I did not like. I had a shrewd suspicion that he was laughing at me in his sleeve. For a few seconds I was so completely nonplussed that I actually acted on his advice. Jack seemed proud of the impression he had produced, for he went on to say, 'You have constantly twitted me with not being my own master in my own house, therefore you are the last person in the world to find fault if I assume the reins of government.'

'But surely I ought to be considered,' I ejaculated faintly.

'Most certainly; only you appear to have forgotten the fact that the mistress of an establishment is at all times subject to the head. Come, little woman, do not let us quarrel

any longer.' And he tried to put his arm round my waist, and draw me to him.

But I shook him off in a very whirlwind of passion. 'Don't touch me—don't come near me. You have said things to me to-day, and spoken words which I shall never forgive, never—never—never, not even if I live to be a hundred.' And so saying, I flounced out of the room, angered beyond measure at being worsted, but angered still more by the consciousness that I had exhibited a lamentable want of tact and temper throughout the interview. In those respects, Jack had scored very decidedly over me. I had behaved like a fool; whereas he had held his own from first to last in a manner which involuntarily commanded my respect. A puppet! a cypher! not he. Whether I would or no, he had forced me to regard him in a new light.



## CHAPTER IX

### FOLLOWING HORACE HUTCHINSON'S ADVICE

I RETIRED to my boudoir—a room which adjoins the drawing-room—and closing the *portière* that separates the two apartments, burst into an agonised fit of tears. I felt revolutionised. Jack had borne my yoke for so long, and had been so quiescent beneath it, that his rebellion was not only a novel, but also a disagreeable experience. It took my breath away, and I wanted to sit down and think. What was it he had said? At first the pain and anger were too sharp for me to remember rightly, but little by little I recalled his words. He had accused me of being domineering and autocratic. By degrees, as I pondered over the situation, a good many unpleasant thoughts presented themselves to my mind. It was quite true that my hands had held the reins of authority, but it was entirely through Jack's own action, and I flattered myself that I had never pulled them

unduly taut. Now it seemed otherwise. My husband was in revolt—active revolt—and complained of my displaying too masterful a spirit. The assertion produced a festering effect. ‘It is his own fault—altogether his own fault,’ I kept on murmuring. ‘He has brought this state of things upon himself, and has no business to lay the blame at my door. I detest your regular managing woman, who wants to set everybody and everything to rights. She is always odious.’

But, little by little, as I sat there alone, I came round to see that perhaps Jack might have some foundation for his accusation, cruel as it was. It was just possible that, quite unknowingly, I had taken advantage of the situation. Jack was essentially a just man, and he would not have spoken as he did without cause. I sought to persuade myself into this belief, and my anger against my husband gradually softened. When he had stood with his back to the mantelpiece and spoken to me in that determined fashion, in my heart I admired him. ‘If only he had held his own like that from the beginning, it would have been better,’ I mused. I had married very young—at the age of seventeen. Even now, I was not old. At twenty-six, one’s youth is not entirely gone.

Still, bad habits soon begin to form. In process of time, had things gone on as they were, it was within the bounds of possibility that Jack might have degenerated into a poor, henpecked creature, and I into a shrewish, fault-finding wife. Plain speaking possessed many drawbacks, but if a few unpleasant words in season helped to avert such a result, they would not prove without their use. I endeavoured to reason sensibly and dispassionately, and in scanning the pages of the past, to discover when and where I had committed errors. Of course, I could recall several occasions on which I had not acted altogether discreetly. They became suddenly elevated into importance, and weighed heavily upon my mind. I resolved that Jack should have no cause in the future to complain of my being domineering. Just as if all women did not cheerfully surrender to a master spirit, when they chanced across one whose superiority was incontestable. But then it must be incontestable. There lay the pith and kernel of the whole thing. I had received a warning. It would be my fault if I did not profit by it. After a while I dried my eyes, which were inflamed with weeping. I felt thoroughly sobered and lowered in my own self-esteem. I can fancy

I hear my male readers say, So much the better. Let me tell them this; the experience is far from being a pleasant one. Having suffered a severe check in my matrimonial encounter, I resolved not to do battle again until I had in a measure recovered my forces. I determined to meet Jack civilly, if coldly. Of course, things could never be again quite the same as formerly. A breach had been made in our relations, but I supposed we might manage to jog along without allowing the state of friction in which we lived to be too easily perceived by the outside world. One comfort was, we should not be peculiar; so many married couples were similarly situated. My illusions were shattered, vanished, but then how few women are lucky enough to retain them! I had had the good fortune to preserve some portion of mine for nine whole years. I had no right to repine because the remnant was now taken from me. I took a melancholy pride in my common sense, and flattered myself that I was excessively reasonable in all my views.

My first care was to conceal from Jack how deeply he had wounded my feelings. I did not choose that he should be made aware of the change that had taken place within me. He

knew me so little that he would not understand. As for sympathy—it was useless seeking it from him. After the events of the morning, I recognised that there was a strain of brutishness in his nature, for which I had never hitherto given it credit. And yet Jack could be such a dear when he chose. Well, let him be master. He ought to be; I should like him to be, as long as it was in a proper way. If not—and I clenched my fists—no man living should succeed in coercing me. I sat down to the bureau, and began writing several letters to personal friends. I was burdened by a large correspondence, which usually took up most of my mornings. It was very wet out of doors. The rain came down in buckets, the sky overhead was grey and sullen, the earth beneath sodden and brown. In the fallows of the fields lay long strips of water which every now and again gave out a chilly gleam. The weather suited my mood. Nothing could be more depressing, or nicely calculated to give a person a fit of the blues. I dipped my pen in the ink and applied myself to the task in hand, trying hard meanwhile to divert the channel of my thoughts. I might have spent a couple of hours thus, when suddenly a most terrific crash in the next room caused me to start to my feet and rush towards

the scene of the disaster. My first idea was that a part of the roof must have given way. Two or three moments sufficed to dispel it, for on entering the drawing-room I perceived Jack standing amid the ruins of my china and ornamental knick-knacks. All my pet tables were overturned, and a good many of their spindle legs were irretrievably damaged. The floor was strewn like a battlefield, and if ever a man looked dismayed at the effect of his handiwork, Jack did. He stood there, golf club in hand, dismally eyeing the havoc he had committed. Pieces of glass and of broken crockery literally covered the carpet. It was a heartrending sight—at anyrate to me, the mistress.

‘Goodness gracious!’ I exclaimed, ‘what is the meaning of this? Have you taken leave of your senses?’

‘I’m most awfully sorry, Janie,’ he said penitently. ‘Upon my word, I hardly know how to ask your pardon properly. It was all owing to that fellow Hutchinson, deuce take him.’

‘Hutchinson?’ I echoed in bewilderment. ‘Who *is* Hutchinson?’

‘Oh! you must know. Horace Hutchinson, the man who writes in the Badminton series about golf, and gives advice to novices.’

‘What of him?’ I demanded impatiently, picking up a Chippendale table on which my little private collection of fancy silver had been displayed. My cherished Dutch cow was in one corner, my French coach and four in another, whilst a tiny mandoline had rolled under the fender. I must say I had hard work to control my temper. Golf again! I might have known it. That miserable mania was responsible for all the misfortunes which befell me. Already I looked upon the time-honoured game as my worst enemy.

‘Well, you see,’ said Jack, ‘it was such a horrid wet day that it occurred to me I could not possibly do better than follow Hutchinson’s advice. Listen to what he says, Janie. I cannot explain nearly as clearly as he writes, and I happen to have the Badminton here.’ So saying, Jack marched towards the mantelpiece, where the book lay open, and taking it up, read out the following:—

“Now, supposing the tyro be determined to form himself on the style of these putters and to putt off the right leg, our advice to him would be as follows—To take his putter with him into some room, upon the floor of which the junction of the boards or the pattern of the carpet show a clearly distinguishable straight line.”

‘How truly ridiculous,’ I ejaculated. ‘The man must be mad.’

“With the face of his putter at right angles to this line,” went on Jack steadily, “let him proceed to take up his position much in the attitude indicated by the diagram for the half-iron stroke, but with feet somewhat closer together. If he find it convenient, he may let his right fore-arm rest upon his right thigh. This will help him to be steady. Let him now with his wrists swing the putter head backward and forward. If it work truly over the line, well and good, but at the first venture it is almost certain that it will not do so. If he find it working across the line—from outward inward—he must advance his left foot and retire his right foot a little. If the club-head work from inside the line as he draws it back to outside the line as he swings it forward, he must, conversely, draw back his left foot and advance his right foot. The hands must always work the putter as comes natural to them, etc., etc. When the player finds himself in a vein of bad putting, he may pretty safely assure himself it is something wrong in the relative position of his feet to the ball. Then let him bring his putter home, and practise again over the pattern in the carpet to get the fault set



right, and he may hope to go forth on the morrow, and putt well again and be happy." There!' concluded Jack, 'that is what Hutchinson says.'

'A lot of rubbish,' I said contemptuously. 'He writes as if hitting a wretched little ball about with a long stick were the be-all and end-all of existence. So you have been putting in my—I mean,' correcting myself quickly, 'in your drawing-room, and done this mischief.' And I glanced regretfully around.

'I'm awfully sorry, Janie, as I said before. I would not have had it happen for a ten-pound note; and you shall have *carte blanche* to replace the damaged articles. I can't say more than that.'

'*Carte blanche* won't replace many of them,' I sighed in return. 'They are, or rather were, old friends, most of them associated with my girlhood.'

'I hunted over the whole house to find a carpet with straight lines in it,' said Jack, 'upon my soul I did, wife. By some fateful coincidence, this was the only one that seemed answerable to my purpose. At first I got on swimmingly, just by moving some of your useless little tables out of the way, but after a while I became interested, or excited, I don't know which, and tried a drive with a real good

swing on it. I forgot, like a fool, that I was cramped for space. By Jove! there was one hideous crash, and the next moment I stood amid the ruins of your drawing-room. Janie, dear old girl,' lowering his voice persuasively, 'can you ever forgive me?'

'I have absolutely nothing to forgive,' I made answer, in a measured tone. 'The drawing-room is yours, not mine.' He looked at me for a moment in astonishment, whilst I went on. 'You are the master of this establishment, as you reminded me only a short time ago. If it were to please your majesty to break and smash every single thing in it, I, the slave, the mistress, the poor, humble subordinate and inferior, could not utter a word—'

'Oh! hang it all,' broke out Jack, 'do not talk like that. Just as if I did not feel bad enough about it already without your pitching into me.'

'I pitching into you!' I returned, with mock surprise. 'No, Jack, "never no more." It pleased you to-day to make numerous accusations against me. Fortunately I have the consolation of knowing that they were not all distinguished by their justice. Shall I ring the bell for Sandy to pick up the fragments that remain? Or perhaps you

would like to clear the drawing-room altogether of its furniture, and use it henceforth as a bad-weather putting ground? No doubt you and he would find it excessively convenient on wet days. As for me, I should still have my boudoir, unless you should happen to take a fancy to it for holing out. You have often called it a hole.'

'Yes, but not in that sense; I only meant as regards size.'

'It will be big enough for me. In future I cannot expect to monopolise the largest and finest room in the house, especially when it is of so much utility to the golfer. I recognise his rights.' And I swept him a curtsy.

Jack simply writhed under my satire. It reduced him to a condition of absolute silence. Like a foolish woman, I gloried in my advantage, and instead of sparing my victim when, metaphorically, he grovelled at my feet, I lashed him still more unmercifully with the sharp whip of my tongue.

'Old Mrs Dormer,' I said pleasantly, knowing her to be Jack's pet aversion, 'is coming to tea this afternoon. As this room is unfit to receive visitors in, and you will probably finish the work of dismantling it completely, and follow Mr

Hutchinson's advice, I presume you will not mind her being shown into your smoking-room? You might teach the dear old thing to putt, eh?'

Jack dashed his club to the ground, and swore a great oath.

'Jane,' he said, 'you make me miserable.'

'John,' I said, in the same unnaturally quiet tone which I had employed from the first, 'you have long ago succeeded in reducing me to a state of abject misery. We can cry quits on that score.'

'Little woman; dear little woman,' he said earnestly, 'I am sorry if I was a bit rough on you this morning. I ought not to have spoken as I did. I felt a horrid brute after you had gone. The fact is, I drank rather too many glasses of champagne last night. They gave me a headache, and did not improve my temper. Let us forgive and forget on either side.'

'Unfortunately, it is easier to forgive than to forget,' I said icily.

'I know I was wrong, Janie. I did not mean one half, nay, not one quarter of what I said. If left to my own resources, I should never get on without you. You are essential to my comfort and my happiness. When we have a tiff, I am

simply miserable. Oh! do make up, there's a dear.'

I have said before that Jack is hard to resist when he pleads. Anyhow, he could always get round me. I might pretend to be very high and satirical for a time, but then he said something nice, which bored a great hole through the fence of my pride. It was so on the present occasion. If he had been unhappy, God knows, so also had I. All of a sudden—I don't quite know why or wherefore, for I am not a weeping woman as a rule—I began to cry. Then, before I could apply my pocket handkerchief to my eyes, Jack caught me in his arms, and kissed the falling tears away. I leant my head on his shoulder with a feeling of thankfulness, for, 'to be wroth with one we love, doth work like madness in the brain.'

'Come,' said Jack presently, that's better, isn't it? It is a grand mistake for married people to fall out; they are too near to one another.'

'I—I thought that you did not care for me any longer,' I murmured.

'Then the quicker you get that idea out of your foolish little head the better. It has not a shadow of foundation.'

'And you do not really think me domineering and tyrannical, Jack?'

'I think there is no bigger little pet in the world when you choose.'

'Jack, your words cut; they cut me just like a knife. I never meant to let you know how much I took them to heart. I meant to go on living by your side, growing colder, and more reserved and estranged. I should have ended by feeling like a stone. Thank goodness! that is over. We have had so few quarrels, and—and, old boy, I believe I am foolish enough to love you.'

A light came into his eyes. He took my face between his hands and gazed at it. 'Do you, Janie? I have often had my doubts on that subject. It has seemed to me that I was much fonder of you than you were of me. After all, it was but natural. You are such a bright, clever little thing, and I am only a lazy good-for-nothing, as you have so frequently told me to my face.'

'Don't, Jack, don't,' I sobbed. 'I cannot bear it—not just now. You are you, and always will be in my eyes, were it not for that horrid golf.'

'Jealous of *it*!' he laughed. 'Capital! I shall end by being horribly conceited.'

## CHAPTER X

### A MEMBER OF THE CELEBRATED LARK FAMILY

My little girl was nearly eight years of age. Hitherto she and her younger brother had been in the charge of a confidential nurse, but I now felt that the time had come when it would be necessary to consider her education more seriously. I therefore intimated to Jack that we ought to engage a good nursery-governess for the child, and he fully concurred in my views.

It was arranged I should go to town for a few days and search for a suitable person. Both Jack and I were anxious that our little daughter should be nicely brought up. We agreed that, in addition to the usual accomplishments, it was good policy also to teach a girl useful and domestic ones. Dorothy was to know something of cooking, dressmaking and housekeeping, so that some day, when the child married, she should not find herself at a disadvantage, like so many of her sex. Long ago, I had learnt a moral lesson from

a friend of mine, which I had seriously taken to heart. Her home had been wrecked simply because she had not the faintest notion how to order dinner. Her husband was a bit of an epicure, as bad luck would have it. At the end of the first six months she came to me and said, 'Janie, I am in despair. I can't keep Algernon at home. He is out night after night, and I can only conclude that he is tired of me already.' Upon this, the poor thing burst into a violent fit of weeping. I tried to soothe her, but in vain.

A day or two later the husband in his turn paid me a visit. During the course of conversation, I upbraided him for his conduct to his wife.

'Upon my soul,' he protested, 'I like Laura just as well as ever I did, but she is a perfect ignoramus about all household matters, and has no more idea of making a fellow comfortable than an infant in arms. Certainly I would dine at home if I could, but how can I, when I tell you that one day she ordered tripe for dinner, and the next day a bullock's heart—and I, who abominate all internal arrangements! It made me sick to look at them. Naturally, I got up from table and went to my club, where I was able to get something decent to eat. Laura made



a great fuss, and vowed I was dreadfully unkind, but for the life of me I cannot see what else I could have done.'

'But you need not go always,' I remonstrated.

'I should not wish to, if it were possible to remain at home, but it's not. Would you believe it, Mrs Calthorpe, we have had no fewer than nine cooks during the six months we have been married. That speaks for itself.'

I pitied both my friends sincerely, and registered a mental vow that my dearly beloved daughter should receive a sensible education, which would never place her in the same sad position as poor Laura. Her husband, by the way, deserted her at the end of a year, and excused himself by asserting that during the whole time of his married life he was literally starved.

Before I went to London, Jack said to me,—  
'I have every confidence in your judgment, Janie. Were it not so, I should make a point of accompanying you. As it is, I fear I should only be in your way, and think it better to stay at home and play golf with Sandy and Barker. I make one stipulation, however. Don't engage anyone but a lady.'

'Is it likely?' I responded, blowing him a kiss from the tips of my fingers. 'Good - bye, you

dear old stupid. Golf will console you for my absence.'

'And let her be young,' he said impressively. 'Nothing is more important than for children to have nice, young, cheerful people about them.'

'And good-looking?' I asked mischievously.

'Most certainly. A child likes the sight of a pretty, pleasant face just as much as its seniors. There is no greater mistake than to surround it with old frumps, who are past sympathising with the frolics of youth.'

Bearing Jack's parting words in mind, I rejected the many elderly ladies, with excellent testimonials and irreproachable recommendations, who came to see me, and who appeared pathetically anxious to secure the situation. They would do anything and everything—had no objection to meals in the nursery, would make Dorothy's frocks, and gladly wash and dress her, if only I would avail myself of their services. My heart ached for these worthy dames, but, alas! I had to disappoint them. With all their good points, they could not rejuvenate themselves. But the more I saw, the more convinced did I become of the wisdom of Jack's advice. Dorothy was naturally old and staid for her years. She wanted a lively companion, who would enter into her amusements with a zest

which middle age may endeavour to simulate, but seldom successfully, since the attempt is invariably attended by effort.

At last, my choice fell upon a very pleasing-looking young lady, who said she would be twenty-three on her next birthday. She had a round, rosy face, bright, dark eyes, an abundance of brown hair, a neat, little figure, and a singularly amiable expression. She was eminently nice-looking, without being precisely a beauty. I had a kind of feeling that it might not be exactly wise to introduce a regular Venus into our establishment. Jack was prudent, and to be trusted in a general way, still—men were men. It was best not to expose them to temptation.

Miss Lark appeared an extremely modest and well-conducted young woman. She stated that she was the daughter of a country clergyman, and had never been out before. Altogether, I took such a fancy to her that I engaged her on the spot, and returned home well satisfied with the success of my expedition to London. I found Jack bursting with golf as usual. During my absence, he had played some wonderful round with Sandy and beaten him hollow, which afforded him infinite satisfaction. I had to listen to his little say before I could get in a word. It is my

firm belief that the diplomatic Sandy, feeling his position to be a trifle insecure after the dinner party night, allowed himself to be vanquished, and took this artful method of becoming reinstated to favour. He was a thorough Scotchman. I did not, however, damp Jack's pleasure by hinting at the above suspicion; he was so triumphant and elated by his victory. Whilst I was away, Lady Marshall had been over, and declared herself perfectly enamoured with golf.

'What on earth did you do with her all the afternoon, Jack?' I asked.

'Oh!' he answered, 'I took her out in the fields and trotted her round. To tell the truth, she was a bit of a bore, and I longed for you to be at home, so as to take her off my hands. I thought she was never going.'

'And could she play?' I inquired curiously.

'Not much. She might improve in time. She has the bone and muscle of a man, which are in her favour. As it was, I just had to fiddle about at her heels and do the civil. It was an infernal nuisance, though.'

'You did not enjoy yourself, then?'

'I can't say that I did. She is an amusing woman in her way, but somehow I never tumbled to her much, as you ought to know, Janie.'

I laughed. 'If you did not enjoy yourself, I have no doubt but what *she* did.'

Jack stuck his hands in his pockets, and gave a little, uneasy cough.

'The woman's a fool,' he observed shortly. 'Come, let us talk of something more interesting. Tell me about the new governess.'

Whereupon I gave him every information concerning Miss Lark, and for five whole minutes, wonderful to record, we discoursed on a subject extraneous from golf. I can't tell you what a relief it was, but, alas! the blessed interlude did not last. We worked round to drives and lofting shots and approach play in no time. Oh! how dead sick I was of hearing about them, but I strove dutifully to conceal my lack of interest, and did my utmost to hide the *ennui* they inspired.

Two days later, Miss Lark arrived, and at starting all went admirably. Dorothy took to her at first sight, which was a great comfort, for I had been a little nervous as to how she would receive a stranger. As for Jack, he pronounced unhesitatingly in Miss Lark's favour, and congratulated me warmly on my choice. I felt quite pleased at my efforts meeting with so much approval all round. A fortnight passed

away without event. Miss Lark and Dorothy settled into schoolroom routine, and my mind was easy as regarded the child. After the first two or three days, she did not miss her old nurse in the least, and was perfectly content to remain in the company of her new preceptress. Things were going remarkably smoothly, when one morning Jack rushed into my boudoir in a great state of excitement. 'What do you think, Janie?' he said. 'I've made such a wonderful discovery.'

'Indeed, dear,' I said, looking up from the butcher's book I was engaged in verifying, 'what might it be?'

'Just fancy! I've found out that Miss Lark is a member of the celebrated Lark family. Isn't it an extraordinary coincidence?'

'What celebrated Lark family?' I demanded, feeling a trifle mystified. 'I have never heard of them. Are they musicians, artists, or what?'

'Oh! dear, no. There are four brothers, all equally renowned in their different ways. There's Willie Lark, and John Lark, Robin and Mark.'

'But, Jack, who and what are they? Their names are quite strange to me. It seems odd their sister should never have mentioned them, if her brothers are really, as you say, such a famous quartette.'

'She knows that you are not over and above partial to golf. They are golfers.'

'Is *that* all?' I exclaimed contemptuously. 'You regularly took me in. For the moment, I quite believed they were people worth knowing.'

'So they are. I wish to goodness we could get them here. Why, John Lark took the champion prize at Sandwich this year, and Willie beat the professionals at St Andrews, playing against the great Tom Tutt, Jock Kernie and Samuel Tripp — a feat that has never been performed before by any amateur.'

'Well! and what if he did? There was nothing much in it.'

'Nothing much in it?' echoed Jack in a pitying tone. 'That shows how absolutely ignorant you are, Janie. I know this: I should consider myself a proud and happy man if I stood in either of the Larks' shoes. And to think of their sister being two whole weeks under my roof without my being aware that she was a member of so distinguished a family!'

'Perhaps Miss Lark is a golfer also,' I observed drily.

'She is; I have already discovered that fact. Of course, she can't drive like a man—no woman

can, they have not the strength—but she is the very prettiest and most accurate approach player I ever saw in my life. Some of her long putts are simply astounding, and she very seldom misses a holing - out stroke. At first, I wondered greatly at her proficiency, but now it is easily accounted for. No doubt her brothers have coached her at odd times.'

'I was not aware that you were in the habit of playing golf with Miss Lark,' I said. 'I thought her time was otherwise occupied; and I am sure I have no desire for her to fall a victim to the golf craze.'

Jack reddened slightly. 'I have seen Miss Lark go round the course once or twice with Dorothy,' he explained. 'Sometimes we have happened to meet at a flag, and then I've been surprised at her style. In fact, it was owing to my expressing an admiration of it that I elicited the information she belonged to *the* great Lark family. I have made her promise to teach me how to approach, as that is, and always has been, my weak point.'

After this conversation, Jack and Miss Lark were a good deal together. At first she seemed shy, and to discourage his overtures. Possibly she imagined they would not altogether please



me. If so, she was correct in her supposition. Jack is not clever, neither is he exactly handsome; but he is strong and honest and manly, and there is something about him which appeals to all women. Before long, I could clearly see that poor little Miss Lark was succumbing to his attractions. Whenever he addressed her she blushed crimson, whilst her eyes were constantly seeking his and evading mine. I knew the symptoms, and felt genuinely sorry for the girl. She was in my charge, so to speak, and nothing but sorrow and disappointment could come to her through losing her foolish heart to a married man. I longed to give her a few words of friendly advice, and to point out the folly of the infatuation which was threatening to master her. But the situation was an extremely delicate one for all parties. Matters had not reached a climax. Indeed, they might never do so, and meantime there was nothing tangible of which I could complain. To the outside eye, everything went on much as usual. Miss Lark did not neglect Dorothy. She had completely won the child's affections, and was kindness itself to her. In truth, she had a charming disposition, and had already succeeded in endearing herself to us. That rendered affairs yet more awkward. I would

not have hurt her feelings for the world. She was a thorough lady in every sense of the word, and yet I could hardly be expected to look on in silence and see her make love to my husband. When I say 'make love,' I don't for a moment mean that she was either forward or obtrusive. To do the girl justice, I firmly believed that she was unaware of her own sentiments, else she would assuredly have been more on her guard against betraying them. I knew that, if I spoke to Jack and advised him not to encourage her, he would only pooh-pooh me, and probably ascribe my warning to jealousy. On the other hand, I hesitated to caution Miss Lark against being so much in his society, fearing that it might create unpleasantness, where hitherto all had been harmonious and smooth. I therefore decided to watch and wait. Thank God! I did not really mistrust Jack. I knew that, in his case, golf was the sole reason of his seeking Miss Lark as a companion. He was desperately, ludicrously anxious to improve. But, on her side, the game was a mere excuse to be near him. I soon found that out. The drawing-room window commanded a view of our two fields; I took to looking out of it a good deal. Occa-

sionally I even examined the landscape through a powerful pair of field glasses. I despised myself for spying on the players, but—I was uneasy; I could not help being uneasy. The girl was so bright and nice and companionable that any man might have been forgiven for taking a fancy to her. And I—I was Jack's wife, who for nine years had exercised a wife's privilege of keeping her husband in order, and telling him plain truths. I no longer blushed when he spoke to me. My eyes met his calmly. His footsteps did not make my blood tingle or my heart beat. I loved him, but my love was characterised by the repose of possession. It had lost something of its youthful ardour. The days of anxiety, of doubt, of hope and alternations were over. And might not he feel the same? Might he not be flattered by the passion he had awakened in the breast of an innocent girl? Sooner or later he must discover it; Miss Lark was bound to betray herself. And what then? Jack was not a Don Juan, but he was a man, with a man's education and way of regarding the female sex. Would he stand proof? When the critical hour came, as come it would, would he have the moral courage to resist? I had my doubts. Should

I, then, speak to Miss Lark? But no! how could I, without some proof to substantiate my suspicions? She might deny them altogether, and laugh my accusations to scorn. If attacked, that would be her natural means of defence. I could not blame her for employing such tactics. She had it in her power to turn the tables upon me, although I was in the right and she in the wrong. If only somebody else would give her a timely word of warning before matters went any further! But there was no one, whilst, from the very fact of being Jack's wife, I was tongue-tied. The days glided by, and I watched the pair with an aching pain growing at my heart. It was odious work, and I hated it. Jack was cheerful and serene; his manner to me underwent no alteration, and he talked golf, golf, golf to Miss Lark, until I am sure she must have been as sick of the subject as I was. She, poor thing, coloured, started, twisted her fingers, smiled nervously, took extra pains to conciliate me in every possible way, and hung on the slightest word that fell from Jack's lips. He was her god. She had mounted him on a pedestal, and worshipped at its base. Although she had no earthly right to fall in love with my husband, I could not help being

sorry for her, and even sympathising after a fashion. Love is a thing not always to be controlled. It may come subtly, unconsciously, as in the girl's case. As long as she abstained from wrong-doing, I felt I had no right to judge her. We are all human, and liable to error.

## CHAPTER XI

### JACK LEARNS THE ART OF APPROACHING

THE climax took place sooner than I expected. It came about in this way. It was a fine February morning, the sun gleamed clear and bright in a pale, blue sky, causing the overnight's frost to glisten in the fields like myriads of sparkling diamonds. The ground was dry underfoot, the air crisp and exhilarating overhead. Whilst Jack and I were breakfasting together, Dorothy rushed into the dining-room in a state of wild excitement. In her little, dimpled hand she waved aloft a letter.

'Mummy,' she cried, 'Margy Paton has written asking if I may spend the day with her. Oh! do, do let me go,' turning a pair of pleading eyes to mine.

'But, Dorothy,' I said, 'what about your lessons?'

'Bother the lessons,' she returned impatiently, stamping her foot upon the floor. 'They are

always in the road whenever one wants to do anything nice.'

'Hush, darling,' I said reprovingly. 'That is hardly the way to speak, especially when you wish a favour granted. You cannot grow up an ignoramus.'

Dorothy stole two arms round my neck, and pressed her warm young lips against my cheek. She thoroughly understood the art of persuasion.

'Dear mummy, I will be ever so good all the rest of the week if only you will let me go.' And by way of adding extra emphasis to her words, she hugged me tight. Opposition was rendered vain.

Jack looked up from the *Sporting Times* he was engaged in reading.

'It is a beautiful day, Janie,' he observed. 'It can do the child no possible harm to spend a few hours with her little friend.'

Dorothy clapped her hands together approvingly, and, forsaking me, ran to her father's side. Seeing that the pair of them were against me, I gave my consent, only stipulating that Dorothy should work well at her studies for the next few days to come. She did not hesitate to make the promise, and an hour later drove *happily off* in the brougham, with Barker on

the box as escort. When she had gone, I went up to the schoolroom and informed Miss Lark that she was at liberty to spend the day as she pleased. She thanked me, but seemed a trifle less bright than usual—at least, so I thought. Having several letters to answer, I shut myself up in my boudoir and pursued my correspondence steadily. Presently I heard voices outside in the hall. They belonged to Jack and Miss Lark. I nibbled the end of my pen stick, and unconsciously found myself listening to their remarks.

‘Good-morning,’ said Jack, in his cheeriest tones. ‘I was just coming to look you up, Miss Lark. You have a holiday, have you not?’

‘Yes,’ she answered. ‘My pupil has gone out for the day, and left her instructress disconsolate behind. Not quite knowing how to pass the time, I put on my things and am going for a walk. The sun looks so tempting.’

‘If you are at a loss for something to do, I wonder if you would give your services to a great, grown-up pupil, Miss Lark, and teach him the art of approaching, which you possess in such perfection?’

She hesitated for a moment before replying, and then said, ‘Of course, Mr Calthorpe, I shall



be only too happy to render you any assistance in my power.'

'Then let us shoulder our irons. See, here is one for you, and mine is over there in its usual corner. All ready? Come, shall we make a start? It is a shame to remain in the house on such a glorious day.'

The front door shut behind them, and once more all was silence. I resumed my occupation, and endeavoured to write as heretofore, but the attempt proved fruitless. Somehow I could no longer concentrate my attention on the task in hand. At length I closed the blotting book, and, rising from my seat, looked out of the window. In the distance, I perceived a tall and a little form battling their way over the ridge and furrow of our furthest field. I gazed at them intently; they possessed a kind of fascination for me. And as I gazed, I suddenly experienced a strong inclination to join the golfers. The morning was so bright and tempting—but to appear to countenance their proceedings, after having spoken so often against the game, would be to detract from my dignity. It was not altogether easy for me to descend from my high horse. I was keenly alive to this fact, so I continued to stand at the window, and to watch the two figures until *they disappeared* beyond the hill and behind

the hedge which separates Morton's field from ours. The minutes went by. They seemed curiously long, and I began to grow impatient. What could be detaining the couple? They had had plenty of time to hole out, and by rights should have been well on their homeward way. Something must have happened. They could not possibly be playing. My thoughts and surmises developed so rapidly, that finally I put on my hat and cloak and sallied out on an expedition of investigation. I was not at ease. I kept asking myself what attraction Morton's green behind the hedge could have to delay the pair such an unconscionable time? This problem excited my curiosity to so great an extent that there remained nothing for it but to clear up the mystery by a personal examination. I therefore climbed over the iron railing that railed off our field from the drive, and trod softly and cautiously until I neared the hedge which shielded the players from vision. I am not going to pretend that I did not feel like a despicable sneak, for I did; but in justice to myself, my anxiety on Miss Lark's account was genuine. Knowing the state of the girl's affections, it seemed neither right nor kind to

leave her to too prolonged a *tête-à-tête* with Jack. It was my duty to keep a motherly eye upon her, for after all she was but young. By such reasoning, I endeavoured to whitewash my proceedings to my conscience.

The hedge happened to be both thick and high. At a short distance, it presented an impenetrable wall to the sight, and in order to peer through its closely-interwoven branches, it was necessary to stoop very low. Near the ground, the roots formed an opening, where it was possible to obtain a peep into the field beyond. With this intention, I continued to move carefully onwards, when suddenly my attention was arrested by a sound which set my heart beating with distressing violence. I hardly know how to describe it exactly; it was a soft, sighing, sibilant sound. Then a frightened, little voice exclaimed, 'Oh! don't, Mr Calthorpe, you mustn't, you mustn't. It is ungentlemanly of you to take advantage of me in this manner.'

This speech was followed by another sound different from the first. It partook of the nature of a gasp or sob. And then a second voice, a masculine voice—*Jack's* voice—said, 'Don't be frightened, you dear little thing. I would *not hurt* you for the world. Upon my soul, I

intended no harm, but somehow or other there is temptation in propinquity.'

'But think of your wife,' said Miss Lark, unsteadily. 'You make me feel such a horrid traitor to her, and she has been so kind to me.'

'My wife is a brick, but never mind her just now,' responded that audacious Jack. 'She need never know, and if she does, I'll square matters. Come, one more, only one more, and then we will set to work at our approach shots again.'

For a moment, I stood rooted to the spot with indignation. A terrible revolution—a kind of moral upheaval—was taking place within me. I was shaken to the very depths of my being. And this was Jack — *my* Jack! Good God! how awful. I devoutly wished now that I had remained in the drawing-room. but it was too late to repossess my former blissful ignorance. How desirable it seemed to me in comparison with this bitter knowledge of my husband's unfaithfulness. My limbs trembled, and yet I felt petrified internally.

A little to the left of where the pair were seated, a gap had been made in the hedge by some cattle. It was temporarily stopped by an iron railing. I clambered over it, tearing

my frock in the process. But clothes faded into insignificance compared with the tragedy of the situation. Although I had on my best tailor-made gown, which cost ten guineas, I took no heed of the rent. White and breathless I emerged before the culprits, taking them completely by surprise. Then I gave rein to my righteous wrath.

'No, sir,' I said, addressing Jack in tones of supreme disdain, 'you will do no more approaching to-day. In fact, it strikes me that Miss Lark has taught you to approach only too well already; you stand in need of no tuition. As for you,' turning to the dismayed girl, 'I recommend you either to go for a walk as you had intended, or else to return to your schoolroom. Mr Calthorpe can enjoy the pleasing task of "squaring matters" with me in your absence. You are not necessary to the process.'

Miss Lark burst into tears at this jibing speech. I knew that my tongue was like a sharp-edged blade at that moment, but I rejoiced at the effect it produced. I was too deeply wounded myself to be merciful to others.

'Oh, Mrs Calthorpe,' cried the poor girl, 'do forgive me. I meant no harm. Indeed—indeed *I did not*—it all came about so suddenly. I

would rather have died than betray you had I known, but I didn't, believe me I didn't.'

In spite of my anger, a temporary sentiment of compassion took possession of me. I realised that she was speaking the truth. She had been blind to the state of affairs, and I did not feel so bitter against her as I did against Jack. She was only a stranger, whose acquaintance we had but recently made. She would go out of the path of our life, and never cross it again in all human probability; but he—he—I had lived with him for many years and been a true wife to him. He had made me believe that he cared for me and for no other woman. Over and over again he had told me so, and now, directly he got the chance, this was how he behaved behind my back. It was odious, revolting, infamous! Henceforth, I should feel like an unfortunate in his arms. His breath upon my cheek would be a profanation, the touch of his lips degradation unspeakable. I shuddered at the mere thought. The future loomed horrible ahead. In the first greatness of the shock, my mind failed to grasp it. I was only conscious of a vast and desolating darkness. Miss Lark did not say another word, but, *turning* · silently away, moved off in the

direction of the house. Jack and I were left alone. I was cold now, icy cold. The hot anger had died out of my heart, and a great sorrow and regret remained. We stood and looked at one another. Gradually two salt tears welled up to my eyes and rolled down either cheek. Jack saw them.

'Janie,' he said, 'will you not even listen to what I have to say in self-defence? Things are not as bad as they seem, I do assure you.'

I shook my head. 'What possible defence can you have, Jack?'

'If only you could be made to understand, and see the matter from a man's point of view, there is nothing terrible in it, really.'

'I don't want to understand from a man's point of view. My purity and modesty would be too grossly outraged,' I retorted.

'Exactly; but then, you see, men and women are different.'

'Oh! that is what you all say when you commit some peculiarly dastardly act and deliberately break your marriage vows. The difference is not to your advantage, although you are given to speaking of it so boastfully.'

He sighed. 'You absolutely good little *women* have one fault. You are so awfully

hard to get on with. You shut your purity and your modesty up within such narrow walls, and are not aware of their limitations.'

'Jack, how dare you speak to me like that, especially after your behaviour with Miss Lark? Do not you know the meaning of the word shame? Surely it is enough that you should make love to our daughter's governess before my very eyes, without going out of your way to insult me to my face.'

He hung his head penitently. 'Janie,' he said, 'I may as well make a clean breast of it. I have behaved like a beast, and that's the truth. Oh! my darling, what can I say to make you believe that I care for you as I do?'

'How can I think you care for me, Jack, when you kiss Miss Lark on the sly, and call her a dear little thing and goodness knows what other terms of endearment? I have been a fool to trust in you as long as I have done.'

He gnawed savagely at his moustache. 'Jane,' he said, 'as I am a living man, I swear to you that you are the only woman in the wide world whom I really love. But when one is thrown with a pretty, nice little girl, who shows a decided—I hardly know how to put it—partiality for one's society, we men are such born idiots,



that somehow or other we feel flattered and get led away. Then things take place that were never premeditated. It sounds lame, but I am telling you the truth.'

'It sounds very lame,' I responded. 'In other words, you accuse poor little Miss Lark of making love to you and leading you into temptation. Jack! Jack!' I exclaimed mockingly, 'what are you coming to? You have indeed fallen low in the moral scale since you attempt to lay the blame of your misdeeds on the shoulders of an innocent girl.'

'I don't,' he said, with considerable heat; for my words rasped him, as they were intended to do. 'Heaven is my witness, nothing was further from my intention. I was only trying to tell you every detail, so that you should be in a better position to realise how the thing came about, without evil being meant on either side. I can't bear when there is friction between us.'

'Friction between us!' I echoed scornfully. 'It would indeed be strange if there were not a considerable amount at the present moment. The scene that, unfortunately, I witnessed this afternoon is branded for evermore upon my memory. It will haunt me to my dying day. I *would give all I possess in the world to be able*

to forget it—to place the same trust and confidence in you as formerly. For, whatever your faults, I *did* believe in you, Jack.'

He passed his hand across his eyes. When he spoke, his voice was muffled.

'My wife,' he said, 'be merciful. Don't overwhelm me utterly.'

'I can't help it. I must say what I think. Oh! Jack, Jack,' and my tones grew tremulous in spite of every effort to keep them hard and steady, 'why have you done this thing? Why have you shaken my trust and esteem? We had our little tiffs and misunderstandings, like most married folk, but nothing ever divided us before as this has done. We are hopelessly parted now.' And as I finished speaking, the tears that would no longer be restrained freely overflowed my eyes. At sight of my grief, Jack tried to put his arm round my waist. I shivered, and shrank away.

'No, do not touch me, I cannot bear it. I refuse to be degraded by your endearments. Henceforth, how can I tell how many dozens of women may lay in your arms and be kissed by your lips? You are no longer my husband—you never can be my husband again. I believed in you and I loved you. Now I do not believe in you any more, and all is at an end.'

'For God's sake do not say that, Janie.'

'I say it, and I mean it. My love is sorely shaken; I do not know yet if any of it remains. What our future lives are to be, the Almighty only knows. We are young still, worse luck! and in all probability have many wretched years before us. I suppose we shall have to reside under the same roof for the sake of the children. I suppose it will not do to set people talking. We must hush up the affair after a fashion—'

'Janie,' he interrupted in consternation, 'have you taken leave of your senses? I admit that I did wrong. I am prepared to apologise to you in the amplest manner, but, after all, a kiss is nothing so very dreadful.'

'Apologise!' I echoed sarcastically. 'Poor, short-sighted man, who has not any knowledge of the female heart, do you imagine for one instant that an apology can be of the slightest use? I tell you that a hundred thousand apologies—nay, a million—could not restore to me what you have robbed me of this day.' And I clasped my hands together tightly.

'You need not be so desperately in earnest,' he said. 'Lots of women think nothing of their husband happening to give a pretty girl a kiss.'

*'I do not belong to the order of "lots of*

women." I have my own opinions on the subject, and none of the arguments you can advance are likely to shake them. If you shatter a china vase into pieces, can you ever make it whole again? You may patch up the fragments with cement, but the beauty of the original article is destroyed. And now, if you please, I will return to the house which was my home. Should you desire that I cease to dwell in it, I will seek some other residence.' So saying, I swept past him, and for the second time climbed over the iron railing, leaving Jack dumbfounded. I had spoken bitter words and hasty words and scathing words, but at the moment I could not recall them; my heart was too full. I went straight to my own room, and, locking myself in, did not appear for the remainder of the day. The hours passed by, and there, in silence and in agony, I battled with the evil thoughts and angry impulses which assailed me. Yet, amidst all the desolation of the situation, a small voice kept whispering, 'Blessed are those that forgive.' But I was unable to forgive then, and refused to listen to the promptings of my conscience. Twice my maid came and knocked at the door, seeking entrance. I sent her away, and bade her leave

me alone. About two o'clock, Jack ascended the staircase, and called out in a beseeching voice,—

‘Janie, dear Janie, do let me come in. I am so miserable about you.’

‘I can’t let you come in,’ I said coldly. ‘At least be generous enough to leave me in peace for a few hours. I want no society—no help. I only want to be left by myself, and not be bothered.’

‘All right,’ he said, in a different tone. ‘You need not be afraid of my troubling you. I am off to London this afternoon. There is no occasion for you to keep to your room on my account. You will find my cheque-book downstairs. I have signed half-a-dozen cheques, so that you may carry on. I do not intend to return until I hear from you. Good-bye, Janie.’ There was a pause, as if he were waiting for an answer, then he went on, ‘Once more, my dear wife, good-bye. Try and think of me a little more kindly, if you can.’

‘Yes, I will try,’ I said, feeling a strange kind of swelling at my heart.

‘I am a big brute, but I am not altogether as bad as you believe. And, Janie, when I am *gone*, don’t be too hard on Miss Lark. Although

appearances are against us both at the present moment, she is a good girl, and really fond of you. It would be cruel to make her suffer for this infernal morning's work. If you must punish somebody, punish me.'

'Your solicitude where Miss Lark is concerned does you honour,' I said stiffly, through the key-hole. 'I will endeavour to be just to her.'

He seemed to linger, as if hoping I would bid him stay, but the demon of anger still had possession of me, and I was as a puppet in its grasp. Then, finding I did not speak, Jack resumed, in quavering accents, 'God bless you, my own dear wife, whom I have wronged and loved. Some day, perhaps, you will learn to distinguish between the ephemeral passion, which is merely a part of the animalism inseparable from man's nature, and a genuine affection deep-rooted and sincere. Send for me when you can, when the wrath and bitterness have died out of your heart, and you will once more suffer me to fold you in my arms. Until then, farewell.'

Another silence. There was a great lump in my throat, tears poured from my eyes. Could this man be a traitor, a hypocrite? Impossible. I turned the lock and opened the door. 'Jack,' I called softly; 'Jack, where are you?' Tremul-

ous and shaken, I waited for an answer. Then I advanced a step into the passage and looked around. He was gone. A minute later, I heard the sound of wheels outside. Looking through the window I saw the back of the brougham disappearing down the drive. On the box-seat sat Sandy, clasping a huge bundle of golf sticks in his arms. Instantaneously my mood changed. Fool! fool that I had been to allow my wrath to be so easily disarmed. Jack was not deserving of much pity after all, since, to atone for the loss of a wife, he could turn so easily for consolation to his beloved golf. He abhorred scenes. Never was there a man who detested them more. By fleeing to Wimbledon or Mitcham, he had escaped the unpleasantness of home. Clever Jack!

Once more I retreated into my room and shut the door behind me. The hours crept slowly away. The house was quiet as death. Without Dorothy and Jack there seemed no life about the place. I missed the sound of their voices dreadfully. And little Jack, who was the living image of his father, was absent on a visit to his grandparents. I longed to clasp my darling son in my arms, and smooth his dear, fair head *whilst he knelt by my side and said his prayers.*

The children! the children! Ah! why were they both away, just when I wanted them most? They only had the power to comfort me in my grief. You men of the world may laugh, and say what a ridiculous to-do about a kiss. I tell you a pure woman can suffer no greater torture on this earth than to feel herself deceived in him she loves. At such seasons the whole world seems to slide from her feet, and it takes many a weary year before she is once more in a position to nicely adjust the mental glasses through which she looks at life. The blow strikes her to the ground, and leaves her all feeble and prostrate.



## CHAPTER XII

### A COUPLE OF FOOLS

IT was almost dark when I heard another tap at the door.

‘Who is there?’ I called out.

‘It’s me,’ responded Miss Lark’s voice. ‘May I come in, Mrs Calthorpe?’

I hesitated for a moment, then, rising from the sofa on which I had been reclining at full length, I answered, ‘Yes, you may.’ I was weary of my own society and miserable thoughts. If I listened to what Miss Lark had to say, it would form a diversion, if nothing more. Besides, I was curious to glean additional information as to the events of the forenoon; so I unlocked the door and admitted her. As she advanced into the centre of the room, I could see that, like myself, she had spent the greater portion of the afternoon in tears. Her eyes were red with weeping, and the point of her usually pretty nose was adorned by a tell-tale colour.

‘*I am so utterly wretched,*’ she said. ‘I felt

as if I could not rest until I had seen you, and explained matters in a measure.'

'I am afraid that is not so easy, Miss Lark,' I said, somewhat severely.

She blushed deeply. 'I know that you are very angry with me, Mrs Calthorpe. 'It could not well be otherwise; and the worst is,' her voice beginning to tremble, 'I have deserved your anger. It is that which distresses me so much, for,' and a low sob impeded her utterance, 'you have been wonderfully kind to me in every respect, and it cuts me like a knife to think I should be the means of bringing unhappiness into your family.'

'Your regrets are most honourable, Miss Lark; the only misfortune is, they come rather late to prove of much service.'

'Alas! I am only too conscious of that fact. I hardly know what to plead in my own self-defence. I am so horribly—so deadly ashamed of myself.' Her bright little face was all working with emotion. Her sweet eyes were moist and dim; she looked the picture of woe. The mere sight of the girl in this plight was enough to disarm my wrath; it softened and faded. 'Dear Mrs Calthorpe,' she went on, timidly taking hold of my hand, 'I never meant any

harm, and I am sure *he* did not either. I would not have proved traitor to you for the whole world. I have lived under your roof, eaten of your bread—oh! it is odious even to think of. And yet,' she continued, with a sigh, 'it is so difficult to explain. I can scarcely expect you to believe me, but indeed, indeed the thing was purely accidental. I haven't the least idea how it came about—'

'You were fond of Jack,' I interrupted. 'I saw that long ago.'

'I was not aware of my wretched secret,' resumed the girl, colouring painfully, 'or I would rather have cut my throat than reveal it. Now I feel as if I cannot possibly remain in this house. I must go, and that at once.'

'I understand your feelings better than you imagine,' I responded. 'Some time ago, I perceived in what direction your affections were drifting, and longed to give you a word of warning, only it was difficult for me to do so. You see, I did not know how you might take advice on so delicate a subject.'

She blushed again up to the roots of her hair. 'You saw, you knew, and I was blind! I swear to you, Mrs Calthorpe, that, until Mr *Calthorpe sat with me under the hedge*, I had

not the faintest notion that—that I cared for him.'

'Poor child,' I exclaimed, looking at her with pitying eyes.

'What! you are sorry for me—you, whom I have injured so cruelly? Ah! but you must be a veritable saint.'

I smiled mournfully, and shook my head. 'Don't make any mistake, my dear; I am no saint, quite the contrary. You would not think me one if you knew the horrid thoughts that have been running through my brain ever since I surprised you and Jac—I mean Mr Calthorpe together. Now listen, you have behaved foolishly and indiscreetly in permitting him to make any advances whatever, but I exonerate you of all evil intentions. There! let us say no more.'

'You do me justice as to the evil intentions,' sobbed Miss Lark, the tears streaming down her cheeks. 'But it was vile of me—wicked all the same. I ought never to have thought of Mr Calthorpe. He was married, and could never be anything to me. I see it quite clearly now.' Again her voice grew tremulous, and for a moment, she seemed on the point of breaking down completely. Then, by a powerful effort, she controlled herself, and went on, 'I must

leave this house ; there is nothing else for it. The sooner I go the better.'

I gazed at her sadly, for I realised that she was both a good and brave girl, as well as an innocent one. I had fully intended to deliver a serious lecture regarding the enormity of her conduct. Now, all inclination to do so vanished, and I could do nothing but take her in my arms and kiss her. She was so lovable in every sense of the word, that, for the moment, Jack's misdemeanour appeared almost natural.

'You poor little thing,' I said. 'I cannot bear the idea of letting you go out into the world all alone. You are too young and too pretty for the lot of the ordinary governess. By rights, you should be the centre of a happy home.'

Miss Lark sighed. 'Don't pity me,' she said unsteadily. 'I have brought my punishment upon myself. I could not expect to escape altogether. Mrs Calthorpe—dear Mrs Calthorpe,' she pleaded, 'when will you let me go?'

'When do you want to go?' I demanded.

'Oh! at once. I feel as if I should simply sink into the ground with shame were I to meet Mr Calthorpe again. I could not do it.'

'*You need not be afraid of meeting him for*

the present,' I responded. 'He has gone to London, taking Sandy and the golf sticks for company. I question if he will return to his home for some little time.'

An expression of relief passed over Miss Lark's countenance. 'Ah! then perhaps you will grant me a day or two in order to make certain arrangements.'

'As many days as you like.' Then my conscience smote me, and I added, 'But, my dear, is it absolutely necessary that you should leave us? If you are sure of yourself now—if you feel that this infatuation is merely like to prove a temporary one, and that you are already in a fair way of recovering from it, might we not all live together in peace and harmony once more?'

She shook her head resolutely. 'No, Mrs Calthorpe; you are generosity itself. Nobody but you would have suggested such a proposition, but I must positively go now, even if it be permitted to me later on to return. Were I sure of myself,' she murmured; 'but no,' speaking in her former decided tone, 'it is best for all parties that I should leave. Don't seek to dissuade me.'

I did not, for I realised the truth of her speech.

I had made the offer partly from impulse, partly from a sense of duty. It was a relief, however, that she refused to accept it. I felt that, in deciding as she had done, Miss Lark was wise. At that moment I was very kindly disposed towards the girl. Whatever her faults, she commanded my sympathy.

'My dear,' I said, 'I believe on the whole that your decision is a right one. Therefore I say no more; but will you promise me something?'

She bowed her head in token of assent, and I went on, 'I want you to promise that you will come back to Dorothy and me as soon as you feel you can do so comfortably. You understand what I mean?—without any risk to yourself and Jack. You see,' and I held out my arms, 'you have managed to steal all our hearts.'

She laid her head down on my shoulder, and for several minutes we snivelled like a couple of fools. I suppose we *were* fools. I had meant to give Miss Lark a rare wiggling, instead of which, here I was beseeching her to return as speedily as possible. And the strange part of the affair was, I felt ever so much better after behaving in this idiotic fashion. The anger in *my heart died* out. The icy sensation that

constricted it thawed, and I was once more human. The pleasure of forgiveness had conquered the pleasure of revenge. Would it were always so. The one ennobles, the other degrades. By-and-by I dried my eyes and smiled.

‘We shall soon have you amongst us again,’ I prophesied. ‘Cheer up!’

‘Dearest Mrs Calthorpe,’ she said, ‘how can I ever thank you for your goodness? Not one woman in a hundred would have heaped coals of fire on her enemy’s head as you have done. I am only a poor little humble governess, but sometimes the mouse has it given it to help the lion. If a day should ever come when I can be of service to you, then count on me.’

‘And what about your future plans?’ I inquired.

‘If you would put up with me until the day after to-morrow, then I should have time to write to my aunt, who will keep me until I am able to procure another situation. She said she would take me if any difficulty arose.’

‘But why be in such a desperate hurry to leave? Mr Calthorpe is away from home, as I told you, and he is not likely to return for some time.’

Her round, little face grew strangely earnest. ‘Dear Mrs Calthorpe,’ she said, ‘you have made



me make you a promise, now I want you to do something for me.'

'Well, what is it?'

'Mr Calthorpe has left the house on my account, has he not?'

I nodded my head.

'Just so,' she continued, her colour rising; 'I feared as much. And as long as I remain in it he is not likely to come back; is it not so?'

'He will come back when I write to him and give him permission, not before,' I said statelily. 'We have arranged that between us.'

Miss Lark looked at me for a second with an air of genuine distress.

'I have no right to advise,' she said timidly, 'but, believe me, the longer he stays away the harder, the more difficult it will be for you both. Do you not understand? Oh! surely you must.'

I gave a signal of assent. In my heart I marvelled where this innocent child had acquired so keen an insight into the workings of the human mind. She seemed to guess by instinct my mental state. The more I hardened myself against Jack, the longer I kept him away from his home, the worse it would be for us both in the end, but especially for me. I knew that.

'*You are so noble and magnanimous,*' went on

Miss Lark, in her simplicity really believing what she said, 'that you can afford not to do things by halves. You have forgiven me my misdeeds; forgive him also—your husband. He is not an accomplished flirt, as you think. On the contrary, he loves you very dearly and truly. If he swerved from his allegiance, it was only in a moment of temptation. Listen, and I will tell you exactly how the whole thing happened,' seeing a stubborn expression steal over my countenance.

'You need not,' I interrupted. 'I know quite enough as it is.'

'I must and will explain,' went on Miss Lark firmly. 'It was all my fault from beginning to end. Why should I spare myself, and wish to soften the circumstances? You shall know the worst—the very worst—of me. I loved him. I was not conscious of the fact, but I loved him all the same. My looks and blushes betrayed me to him. We were seeking for a ball together under the hedge. His cheek brushed against mine quite accidentally. I ought to have taken no notice; instead, I gave a little, foolish cry. It escaped from me involuntarily. Then he asked me if I cared for him. Like an idiot, in the confusion of my thoughts I hung my head and did not reply in the negative. Upon

this he kissed me, and called me a dear little thing, and just then you surprised us. But it was not his fault, only mine.'

'I cannot see that,' I said grimly. 'He had no business to kiss you.'

'I was the temptress who put evil in his way,' said self-accusing Miss Lark. 'He does not care the least for me, really. Mrs Calthorpe, I am telling you the truth. As far as he is capable, that man cares for no one but you.'

'You are wise in making a reservation,' I observed.

'Do not drive him from your side,' resumed the girl, with increasing earnestness. 'You may have misunderstandings now and again, but such affection as his is rare to meet with. You can believe me or not, as you like.'

'I should be more pleased if he showed his affection in a better manner.'

'Men are different from ourselves,' urged Miss Lark, unconsciously making use of the precise argument employed by Jack. 'We cannot judge them as we judge our own sex. Oh! do—do let him come back. I shall be utterly wretched if I leave this house feeling that I have been the cause of permanent mischief between you and *your husband*.' So saying, she put her arms

round my neck, and pressed her soft, young cheek against mine. Somehow, the girl had such winning ways about her that she conquered my stubbornness.

'You are asking a hard thing of me,' I said, beginning to yield.

'But the longer you put off doing it, the harder it will become,' she said.

'Perhaps so,' I sighed, unable to deny the truth of her reasoning.

'You promise?' she said eagerly.

There was a pause, then in sober accents I said, 'I promise. Only you must give me until to-morrow to consider what I am going to say.'

She looked at me a trifle wistfully, but, perceiving that the concession had cost me a good deal, she wisely refrained from further speech. All of a sudden, we heard Dorothy's bright voice in the hall below. We both rushed to greet her on arrival. I clasped my little daughter in my arms, and hugged her with an energy which almost frightened the child.

'What is it, mummy?' she asked.

'Have you had a pleasant day, my precious?' I inquired, parrying the question.

'Oh, yes,' she answered; 'it has been such fun. We rode ponies, and played at golf, and

hide-and-seek, and puss in the corner. Where is dad? I have a message for him from Mr Paton. He wants to know if he may come to-morrow?’

‘Your father has gone to London, my love.’

‘To London! He never told me he was going. What has he gone for? And when is my papa coming back?’

‘To-morrow, or the day after,’ interposed Miss Lark, seizing Dorothy in her arms and carrying her off to bed. Soon the tired child was fast asleep, and her preceptress and I sat down to a diminutive dinner. We were both very silent, and suffered from headache. At ten o’clock we retired to our rooms.

‘You will not forget your promise?’ she whispered in my ear, as we wished one another good-night. ‘Do not put off its fulfilment.’

‘I will try and compose a letter now,’ I answered. To be quite candid, I was thankful to Miss Lark for having wrested the promise from me. Jack had only been gone a few hours, and already I longed for a sight of him. Strange to say, I had grown so accustomed to his golf jargon that I even missed *it* during the dinner hour. Once more in the solitude of *my own* apartment, I took pen and paper,

and, after some consideration, wrote the following letter:—

‘You had better come back for the sake of our children and all our sakes. If I acted too hastily—if I resented your conduct more keenly than was wise—if, as you hinted, my ideas are narrow-minded and limited in comparison with those of the fashionable world, I am sorry. We are man and wife. No doubt it was absurd of me to imagine we might remain lovers all our lives. Well, I accept the situation. Henceforth we can go our different ways, but, if nothing more, we can at least be friends. Miss Lark leaves the day after to-morrow. She will not stay. I tried to persuade her to do so, but she is firm in her intention to depart. I think she is wise. It will be less awkward to meet in her absence.

*P.S.*—I hope you are enjoying your golf.’

The next morning I walked down to the village, and posted this letter with my own hands. I told Miss Lark that I had done so, and she thanked me by an expressive glance. I felt easier after the missive had been dispatched. About ten o’clock on the following day, a telegram was handed to me from Jack.

'Will be with you this afternoon,' he wired.

Miss Lark smiled faintly.

'You see,' she said to me, 'I was right. He is glad enough to return to your side directly you give him the chance.'

She herself hastened her preparations in consequence of Jack's arrival, and the carriage which went to meet him at the station bore her away. My last sight was of a little figure stretching out of the window, whilst its owner blew me kisses from the tips of her fingers.

'*Au revoir*,' I called out as cheerfully as I could, for I hated letting her go in this manner. 'Let me know the very minute you can return to us. I shall only engage your successor temporarily.' I had a conviction that, after all that had taken place, the girl would soon be cured of her folly. She was too honest, too good and too sensible to allow herself to drift into a profitless current once her eyes were opened. The lesson she had received had been sharp. She would take it to heart, and learn wisdom by experience.

When she was gone, I went upstairs, and put on the most becoming gown I possessed. I took infinite pains with my toilette, and sat *quite half-an-hour* before the looking-glass, curl-

ing and arranging my hair in a peculiar fashion which Jack admired. It was horribly silly of me, but I was seized by an insane desire to appear to advantage in his eyes. What I should say, how I should bear myself, I had not an idea. I awaited his advent with the nervousness of a bride in her teens. When at length I heard the sound of wheels rolling along the carriage drive, my heart beat to such an extent that I could hardly breathe. Something within seemed to suffocate me. Next his voice sounded in the hall as he inquired in what room I was sitting. Then a kind of mist descended before my eyes and blurred my vision. Everything about me seemed to dance and whirr and fade. All of a sudden I felt myself clasped tight in his arms, and he was covering my face with kisses. There were tears on my cheeks that were not mine, and then the drops rolled from my eyes also. I put my arms round his neck.

‘Janie,’ he said, in a hoarse voice, ‘my blessed little Janie!’

‘Oh, Jack,’ I whispered, nestling closer to him, whilst an ineffable sense of thankfulness descended upon my spirit. . . For a long, long time that was all we said. The clock ticked



away on the mantelpiece, the fire burned bright in living flame, while my little fox-terrier, Bimbo, snored peacefully on the hearth, unheeding of the emotions disturbing his master and mistress.

Presently Jack said in a low voice, 'The little girl—has she gone?'

'Yes, she has gone, it was best so; but some day, Jack, she has promised me to return. I was sorry for her, but it could not be helped.'

He smoothed the hair from my brow.

'Beloved,' he said, 'you are a good woman and a noble, since you know how to be generous to those weaker in character than yourself.'

The praise was not deserved. No one knew that better than I, but, coming from the source it did, it was sweet. It cheered and encouraged me beyond measure. I a good woman! Never was there a greater mistake. But I was glad Jack thought me one.

## CHAPTER XIII

### COOK AND I TAKE TO GOLF

THE winter wore slowly away, and the genial spring took its place. The grass became green, the sky blue, mottled with fleecy white clouds; lambs began to frisk in the fields, and the hedgerows were covered with bursting buds. The air was sweet and odorous, and the days lengthened perceptibly. Jack's mania for golf increased, rather than decreased, with the fine weather. From morning until night, he was striding over the course. His energy was simply astonishing, and he tired out all his partners, one after the other. He looked wonderfully well, brown and rosy, whilst the muscles of his leg no longer gave him the slightest trouble. He might easily have snatched the closing days of the hunting season had he been so inclined, but he had thrown up all his horses, and declared it was not worth beginning to condition them just when the chase was on the point of giving over. My private belief is,

he was happier playing golf. He had so thoroughly entered into the spirit of the game, that he grudged every minute spent apart from it. The men connected with our establishment were kept more fully employed than ever. We had been obliged to put on a boy in the garden, as Johnson was so frequently engaged in rolling the greens. As for myself, I had completely given up all notion of going out driving or visiting. The horses were there, it is true, but not the driver, and I was scarcely a sufficiently good enough whip to handle a pair of high-spirited horses like Beau and Dandy. I therefore begged Jack to sell them off for what they were worth, and buy me a quiet pony instead, which I could manage without fear of accidents. He promised to do so, but had a difficulty in finding one to his mind. Meanwhile, I seriously contemplated learning to ride a lady's safety bicycle as a means of getting about the country. Jack pretended to be horrified at the idea, but I told him that if I went in for cycling he would be altogether responsible for my new departure. Such a notion would never have entered my head had I possessed some convenient means of locomotion, but during the winter I had discovered

that a daily constitutional of a couple of miles along a muddy road was not only monotonous in the extreme, but had also a narrowing effect upon one's mental horizon. One wearied of the same scenic effects, and longed for a variety. Besides, I was a bad walker and soon tired. The bicycle appealed to my imagination as something a little venturesome—and in those days a little unusual in my class of life. I determined to take lessons at the very first opportunity. I had scarcely sufficient courage to commence them in our local town, where every second person knew me by sight. I decided to wait until we left home, and then return in triumph—an accomplished cyclist. And what fun it would be astonishing Jack.

As the days grew longer, the unpunctuality of the household increased to an alarming extent. Meals, but more especially dinner, were at all hours. This was the kind of thing that went on perpetually. I would enter the dining-room with the children at half-past one, and not find a vestige of luncheon on the table. When I rang the bell, nobody would appear to answer it. Butler and footman were out golfing. I would then send Dorothy to the kitchen to inquire the reason of the delay. She generally returned with a message

from Markham to the effect that the meat was spoiling, the pudding burning, but that Sandy and William were in the fields with Mr Calthorpe, and had apparently forgotten the passage of time. At anyrate, *she* could not get them to come in and attend to their duties. Then little Jack would be sent off in search of the recalcitrant pair, and eventually, when the children and I were in a half-famished condition, in rushed the servants, their faces glowing red from the spring sun and winds, and shovel the dishes on the table anyhow. A few minutes later, Jack, the elder, would appear, radiant with health and pleasure, and murmur a word of apology for keeping his wife and family waiting. 'His watch was wrong; he had not an idea it was so late; time passed in such an extraordinarily rapid manner,' etc., etc. Our dinner hour was supposed to be at half-past seven. Sometimes I would come down dressed for the evening meal. The clock would strike half-past seven, quarter to eight, eight o'clock. Then, as I never take afternoon tea, the pangs of hunger would force me to ring the bell and ask why dinner was so late. Presently Jack turned up *clad in his golfing costume*, and popping his

head in at the door said, 'So awfully sorry to keep you waiting, Janie dear. I won't be a minute. That last round took longer to finish than I thought.'

'Are we never going to get anything to eat?' I inquired impatiently. 'I can't think what has come to all the servants; they have grown so dreadfully unpunctual. There no longer seems any fixed hour for meals.'

Then the truth came out. 'Upon my word,' said Jack, 'I am a stupid idiot. Being such a lovely day I put off dinner until eight o'clock. I thought you would not mind, Janie, and of course I meant to tell you, but somehow or other it quite escaped my memory.'

It was useless attempting to remonstrate. The 'Golfing Man' is a personage quite apart from the rest of Creation. He sees everything through the medium of golf, and all else is subservient to the adored game. I had already discovered this fact, much to my tribulation. But as the old adage so truthfully asserts, even a worm will turn. Now and again I might have put up with the irregularity at meals and terrible want of punctuality, but when I found that this state of affairs was rapidly degenerating into a permanent one, I meditated in what manner I

could best give vent to my pent-up irritation, and show Jack how selfish and inconsiderate his conduct was. I cudgelled my brains for several days, and at last hit upon a plan which promised to prove satisfactory, and teach Master Jack a very necessary object-lesson. So one day I went into the kitchen, and said innocently to Markham, who was an old and trusted servant, 'Markham, do you ever play golf?'

She burst out laughing in my face. There was a derisive ring about her mirth.

'Not I, ma'am. I holds with Johnson, and would not waste my time over that there rubbishing game, if it were ever so. I look upon it as a regular mania, a kind of hydro—hydrophobia, and that's the truth, saving your presence. No, I don't play golf, and never want to. Since the men have all taken to it, there's not a bit of peace in the household.'

'I entirely agree with you, Markham,' I responded, 'only it is wiser for us to keep our opinions to ourselves. But I have been thinking that you and I between us might manage to turn the tables on the golfers, and teach them a lesson which may be of some service. There is no harm in trying.'

Markham's broad, good-humoured face widened *in a smile.*

‘Lor’, ma’am,’ she exclaimed, ‘I only wish to goodness we could do so. The men are always gallivanting about at meal time, and it’s real disheartening to a person like myself, who takes a pride in her perfession.’

‘I think I can come to your assistance, Markham, if only you will promise to help me in return.’

‘Help you, ma’am! And in such a cause! I shall be too delighted.’

It was evident to me that Markham meant what she said, so, perceiving that I had secured an ally, I resumed, ‘Then, Markham, I want you to make us a pie for dinner to-night. You are making pastry for the children at luncheon, are you not? If I remember rightly, they were to have apple puffs.’

‘Yes, ma’am, Miss Dorothy asked for the puffs. They are a special favourite of hers, bless her little heart!’

‘Well, then, Markham, make a double allowance of crust. As for the interior of the pie, I will give you something to put into the dish. Do you understand?’

Markham’s countenance beamed with intelligence.

‘I fancy that I do—at anyrate partly.’



'That is right. We will have neither soup nor fish to-night; the pie will comprise our entire dinner. If the worst comes to the worst, there is some cold meat in the house, I suppose?'

'Yes, ma'am, there is the cold salt beef you had yesterday.'

'That will do nicely; and now, promise me faithfully to make the pie strictly according to my directions. Everything depends on your following them implicitly.' And leaning over, I whispered a few words in Markham's ear.

She exploded with laughter, and slapped her big red hand several times on her thigh in appreciation of the joke. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, 'that will be fine.'

About seven o'clock I made a new departure. When Jack arrived at the first teeing ground with his retinue of men, to his great surprise he came upon Markham and me, both wildly flourishing our clubs.

'Why, Janie,' he ejaculated in amazement, 'what in the name of wonder are you two doing here?' And he stared from one to the other.

It was only with difficulty that we kept our *countenances*.

‘Oh! nothing,’ I responded, with simulated nonchalance. ‘Markham and I have become inoculated with the golf fever, and thought we would try our hands at a game. It is a pity for us not to practise on so fine an evening.’

‘But—’ began Jack, in a tone of disapproval.

I interrupted him hastily. ‘There can be no possible reason why I should not play with Markham. I might just as well say you ought not to have Sandy, Barker, William, Johnson and all the rest of them. They contribute to your enjoyment, and Markham is good-natured enough to contribute to mine.’

‘Oh! of course, quite right, quite right,’ said Jack, in accents which betrayed that he did not half relish the argument, but recognised his own powerlessness to oppose it. ‘I thought you detested golf.’

‘I did, but you have made a convert of me. My sole regret now is, that I have wasted so much time. I only wish I had practised all the winter as you have done. I am no longer surprised at your enthusiasm. The game is marvellously fascinating once one takes to it, and completely carries one away. Come, Markham,’ addressing my companion, whose

face was wreathed in the broadest of smiles, 'we shall not finish our round if we stand here talking any longer. It is your turn to drive, if I remember rightly.'

Jack stood and stared at me as if I had taken leave of my senses. He was too taken aback to say another word, and I secretly enjoyed his discomfiture. As for Markham, she was temporarily incapable of obeying my injunction, since she had to hide behind the nearest hedge in order to conceal the merriment which convulsed her. Jack moved slowly off, accompanied by his crew of attendants. Then I said, 'Now, Markham, you must keep a sharp look-out, and every time you perceive Mr Calthorpe anywhere within sight, we will pretend to be deeply interested in our game, and move forward.'

We acted up to these tactics with such success that Jack was completely deceived. He fancied we were really having a most animated contest, whereas we spent more than half our time sitting down, waiting for him to reappear. At about a quarter past eight he finished his own round, and looking at his watch came up to me and said, 'I say, Janie, how much longer are you going on? We sha'n't have any dinner to-night *if you keep Markham away from her kitchen.*'

'Oh! bother dinner,' I exclaimed impatiently. 'How can you expect people to mind about it just when they are in the middle of a most exciting game?'

'It is now a quarter past eight,' he protested. 'Besides, the light has failed.'

'All right, dear old boy,' I said, 'I'll come directly. You go in, and I will follow. Only we must play off the last hole.'

Then, as he walked slowly off in the direction of the house, I shouted after him, 'By-the-bye, dear, I quite forgot to tell you that dinner is not to be until a quarter to nine to-night. I thought you would not mind.'

Jack whistled disapprovingly. 'A quarter to nine!' he ejaculated. 'What an ungodly hour for a famishing man to dine at. I'm most confoundedly hungry. What made you give such an order, Janie?'

'Only so as to allow Markham and me plenty of time for a good game of golf.'

Jack looked utterly mystified, and also a little cross. He did not in the least see the point of the joke. I scarcely thought he would when turned against himself. People seldom do on such occasions.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DINNER SUFFERS

NO sooner had the front door closed after him than Markham and I both burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. We laughed until our sides ached.

'We must keep up the farce,' I said. 'It will not do for us to go indoors just yet.' So we pretended to knock about the balls and march round that old golf course for fully twenty minutes longer. Then, at last, I took compassion on the starving one within the house. As I entered the hall, Jack came out into it.

'Come, hurry up, Janie,' he said; 'what on earth have you been doing? I am simply famishing, and feel as if I could go on eating for a week.'

'So sorry, dear boy; I will be as quick as possible dressing. Fortunately, if anyone can make allowance for the ardent golfer, you are the person. Somehow or other one seems to forget all about time when one is playing. It *flies* in the most extraordinary manner.'

'I'm awfully glad you have taken to the game at last,' said Jack, still quite unsuspectingly. 'All the same, moderation is best in everything.'

'Yes, Jack, I thoroughly agree with you. We should both try and practise it.'

'You look dead tired, Janie, and no wonder, after the amount of exercise you have taken. Why, you must have been round the course at least twice.'

'Thrice,' I corrected mendaciously. 'I did not feel tired at the time, the excitement was so intense, but I am a little knocked up now. However, I shall recover when I have had my dinner. I want it badly.'

'And I am sure I want mine,' he rejoined, 'so please make haste over your adorning. Put on an old tea gown, and be as quick as you can.'

I ran upstairs, smiling broadly to myself. No wonder Jack was hungry. It wanted exactly twenty minutes to nine, and, with the exception of a whisky and soda, he had had nothing since luncheon. I should have felt sorry for him had I not reflected how often I and the poor little children had been in a similar plight, thanks to his unpunctuality.

'A lesson will do him all the good in the

world,' I mused. 'I wonder how he will take it? Up to the present, he has not the least idea that I am playing tricks upon him. It is wonderful how obtuse he is.'

Ten minutes later I descended to the smoking-room, and Sandy immediately announced dinner. Without a moment's delay we marched into the dining-room. On the table stood a large pie, whose steaming crust sent forth a most pleasing aroma. I glanced at it with a sense of inward mirth.

'Hulloa! how's this?' exclaimed Jack. 'No soup or fish to-night? What's the matter?'

'The fish man did not call to-day as usual,' I answered. 'As for the soup, Markham and I were so interested over our game that she forgot all about the stock-pot, and the kitchen-maid let its contents boil down to nothing. Dear old boy,' putting out my hand affectionately, 'I hope you won't mind, just for once. You see, I took Markham away from her work much as you take the men from theirs, and of course it makes a difference.'

'Humph!' grunted Jack in return, 'I don't altogether approve of the women-folk not attending to their duties. Everybody can't play in *this* world.'

'You are quite right there, and for that reason, I presume, it is desirable the masculine sex should do nothing, whilst the feminine portion of the community slaves for both. Nevertheless, I confess it surprises me you should object to any of us playing *golf*.'

'I don't object—at least, not altogether; but it seems absurd to be kept waiting for one's dinner until nearly nine o'clock.'

'We have often not sat down to luncheon until half-past two,' I observed.

Jack shot a suspicious glance at me. 'All right,' he said testily, 'we need not discuss the matter. As it happens, I fortunately like few things better than a good meat pie. I daresay I can make my dinner off it. What is it made of? Steak, veal and ham, rabbit, pigeon, eh?'

'I—I am not quite sure. I rather fancy curried eggs,' I responded evasively.

'Curried eggs! Phew! that is not very substantial fare for two hungry people. Jane, my love, will you see that this does not occur again?'

'Very well, Jack, my darling,' I answered meekly.

'If you must needs play golf with Markham,



he went on severely—‘although it strikes me as being a very *‘infra dig.’* proceeding for a lady in your position—you had better arrange for her services in the forenoon, when she can be more easily spared from her rightful domain.’

‘Yes, Jack; I am sorry you are cross. I foolishly imagined that if I followed your example I could not possibly do wrong.’

He reddened. ‘What I do, and what you do, are two different things altogether.’

‘Indeed! I was not aware of that fact.’

‘The two cases are not comparable,’ he said, with hauteur.

‘Are they not? I apologise for my stupidity, but really I fail to discern wherein the difference consists.’

‘As I said before, we will not prolong the discussion just now,’ said Jack, in a tone as if he were issuing an ultimatum.

‘No, we are both too hungry. Jack,’ holding out my plate, ‘give me some pie.’

Jack took up a knife and fork, and with great dignity proceeded to dive into the interior of the dish before him. Suddenly his countenance assumed an expression of the most supreme astonishment. ‘Why, what have we here?’ he cried, *producing a couple of steaming Silvertown balls.*

I clapped my hands together, and went into fits. I could not check myself.

‘What the devil is the meaning of this tom-foolery?’ he asked sternly.

Then I wiped the tears from my eyes, and managed to control my merriment.

‘The meaning is this,’ I said. ‘The children and I are tired of never knowing at what hour we are to have our meals. It is bad for them, for at their age the digestion is often delicate. We have waited and hungered for your pleasure long enough, in all conscience. You either could not, or would not, see how this detestable golfing mania of yours is disorganising every arrangement of the household. For the sake of a paltry game, the internal economy of our establishment is reduced to a state of sixes and sevens. I endeavoured to put the matter before you in its true light, but you only pooh-poohed my remarks, or else got angry. So I resolved to turn the tables, and let you experience, in your own person, how disagreeable things can be when you, and not we, are the victims of the golf epidemic.’ Once more I laughed so long and so loudly that at last Jack could not resist the contagion.

‘Done in the eye, Janie, I’ll admit,’ he said

'You are a wonderful little woman.' I was relieved to find he took my joke in such good part. Although I had carried a bold front, up till now I had suffered from several inward qualms as to the result of my object-lesson. What a good fellow Jack was! 'It never occurred to me before,' he went on, 'but I see now that I have acted a little thoughtlessly at times, and not considered you and the kids sufficiently. You have scored over me to-day, no end; and now, Madam Jane, since you are complete mistress of the situation, what can you give a poor, starving and demoralised husband to eat?'

His humility and good temper disarmed me. 'Oh! Jack,' I cried, 'I am so sorry. I would not have made you go without your dinner had I known. I did it for fun, quite as much as for anything else. I am afraid—I am afraid that there is only some cold boiled beef in the house.'

'Cold boiled beef!' he exclaimed. 'Nothing could be better. Let us have it in at once. I'm longing to put my tooth into something edible.'

'Jack,' I said, recovering from my temporary compunction.

'Yes, what is it?'

‘Before they go, won’t you just try some of your own lovely Silvertown balls? They really do look most beautifully tender and juicy.’ And sticking my fork into one, I held it up close under his nose.

Both Sandy and William had to bolt from the room at this juncture; they were unable to retain their gravity. When they were gone, Jack pinched my ear, and said, ‘You young monkey! To think of your playing off such a trick upon your poor, harmless husband. And you have not really taken to golf?’

‘Not I. I have not the smallest inclination that way. It is a man’s game, not a woman’s.’

‘How about bicycling?’

‘I quote your own words, “That is different altogether.” Do you know, Jack, I thought I should have died when you came upon Markham and me playing together, and I saw your face of disapproval. It was as good as a play.’

‘Well, Janie, I admit that it did not seem quite the thing.’

‘And I do not think it quite the thing for you to spend all your time with Barker and Sandy, whilst their work is necessarily neglected.’

Jack reflected for a moment, and made no immediate retort to this speech.

'I tell you what, Janie,' he said presently, 'we must be tolerant with one another's infirmities, eh? What do you say?'

'I thoroughly agree, only so far, it strikes me, the tolerance has been exercised mostly upon my side. How is the beef, Jack? seeking to change the subject. 'Is it good?'

'Not particularly. Is there nothing else coming? I'm still ravenous.'

I looked and felt somewhat guilty. 'I'm afraid not, Jack. You see, I wanted you to have a real lesson whilst I was about it.'

'You have succeeded,' he said grimly. 'No fear of my not being in in time for meals tomorrow. Ring the bell, will you, dear? I intend to order the brougham to come round immediately. Perhaps if I run over to the Patons' I may be able to get something to eat there.'

'But, Jack,' I expostulated, 'they will think it so strange if you tell them that you are starved at home. My character as a housekeeper will be gone.'

'I can't help that; you should have thought of all this sooner. I must and will be fed. I am as hungry as a hawk, and to my certain knowledge that beef has been up three times *already*. It is horribly dry and salt.'

'It has only been up twice,' I corrected.

'Twice? Well, it makes very little difference. It's simply uneatable.'

'If you go to the Patons', you won't mention the trick I have played upon you?' I pleaded. 'I shall never hear the last of it if you do.'

'If questioned, I shall tell the truth,' rejoined Jack. 'Should my hostess display any curiosity as to my untimely appearance, I shall inform her of the fact that, in a judicial mood, my wife deemed it right and fitting to place before her famished spouse a pie containing nothing more nourishing than dirty Silvertown balls.'

I listened to his words in despair, and all of a sudden my actions appeared intolerably foolish. Why had I not left Jack alone?

'My dear boy,' I said faintly, 'can you not see a joke? You seem to be entirely deficient in humour. Where, oh! where is your sense of the ridiculous?'

'I confess that it does not render me much assistance in the present crisis,' said Jack, hugely enjoying my discomfiture, and the adroit manner in which he had succeeded in turning the tables. 'My dear Jane, rightly or wrongly, you sought to teach me a lesson. Perhaps I may profit by it in the future; but meantime you must not

complain if I endeavour to teach you one in your turn.' So saying, he pushed his chair back from the table, and stalked out of the dining-room, leaving me in a state of consternation as to his intentions

'Jack,' I implored, running after him, 'don't go, please don't go. I quite forgot there are some chops in the house. Markham will cook them for you in ten minutes, and you can have the remains of the apple puffs which the children had at luncheon. I am sure you will get quite as much to eat here as at the Patons'; besides, they will have finished dinner. It is a three-mile drive, too.'

Jack turned round, his eyes twinkling with merriment, and caught my face between his two hands. I tried to withdraw it, but he held it tight.

'So ho! Madam High and Mighty, you have come to your bearings at last. All right, I'll stay; only, recollect henceforth that two can play at the comparatively easy game of lesson-giving. It requires no special talent on the part of the instructor, whereas a docile pupil is much more of a rarity.'

And then he stooped and touched my lips *with his*. At that moment I had not a particle

of fun left in me; Jack had such an extraordinary knack of always putting me in the wrong, and making his good temper shine out in contrast to my bad one. I had suffered a crushing defeat. All the same, I had cured him of his unpunctuality for the present. The next day he presented himself both for luncheon and dinner, and I therefore concluded that, in spite of his airs, he had taken my lesson to heart more than he chose to acknowledge. Unfortunately the various scenes which I have attempted to describe left their mark. We were no longer on quite such amicable terms as formerly. An under-current of friction was gradually establishing itself between us.



## CHAPTER XV

### A STATE OF FRICTION

So long as the hunting season lasted, we had only occasional visitors for the purpose of playing golf, but directly the chase came to a termination, this state of affairs became completely altered. True, a small proportion of our neighbours took themselves off to early salmon rivers in Scotland and Ireland, but the majority, who were not so fortunate, remained quietly at home, complaining bitterly of *ennui* now that fox-hunting was no longer feasible. It was too soon to go to London—the season had not yet begun—and for the next month or six weeks they were at their wits' end how to kill time. It hung desperately heavy on their hands.

In this predicament, Jack with his golf course proved a perfect godsend to all the idle men within a radius of ten miles. Every day they came over in twos and threes, and I never knew how many to provide for. The addition of *several hungry gentlemen* made a considerable

difference to the commissariat department, and, despite my efforts at economy, the house bills increased in an unsatisfactory manner. This, however, was a minor detail in comparison with the loss of time entailed by the continuous presence of company. I do not know whether I am unsociable by nature, but I can always amuse myself after my own fashion, and am never so happy as when with my intimate belongings. It may be, too, that I am afflicted with the curse of shyness. Anyhow, I derive but little pleasure from the society of strangers. It now seemed my fate to be perpetually thrown with them. All the friends of *our* friends were brought by their hosts and hostesses to play golf on our ground. It made something for them to do. Jack simply revelled in the numerous visitors, and never wearied so long as he could secure a partner to play a game with him. He cared for nothing but golf, and grudged every minute spent away from the course. I should not have minded so much had he contented himself with asking the men. They knocked about the balls, and left me and the children in peace to pursue our usual avocations. But Jack was a hospitable fellow, and when Mr Snooks of Snookham Castle asked to be allowed to bring over a friend, Jack im-

mediately invited the whole of that gentleman's female belongings. They would come by a morning train, arriving at our place a little after ten, and then, to my dismay, I found myself saddled with two or three deadly dull ladies on whom I had never even set eyes. Of course, it invariably fell to my share to amuse them, and as their train did not convey them back until past five, it is not exaggerating the matter to say that I often felt ready to drop with fatigue after one of these visitations—for I can call them by no other name. Indeed, in process of time my nerves became totally unstrung, for I never knew when the Philistines would descend upon me. I could not settle down to any pursuit, so great was the dread of interruption. I became feverish and excitable.

Another thing that annoyed me very much about this period was, Jack got into the habit of asking all kinds of people to the house whom I would not have visited under ordinary circumstances, and whose acquaintance I had not the least desire to make. He did so, also, without ever consulting me as to my individual arrangements. It was taken for granted that I had none. For instance, he would say to *me in the morning*, 'Oh! by-the-bye, I have

got Denman coming over almost immediately to play golf, and he is bringing that nice little wife of his. I did not exactly want to ask her, but I could not very well leave her out. You won't mind doing the civil and looking after her a bit to-day, will you?'

'I shall mind very much,' I replied, with some acerbity. 'Mrs Denman was a ballet dancer, and is not a person with whom I care to associate.'

'Oh! she is quite respectable since she married.'

'I do not question Mrs Denman's virtue; I merely say that I have no special wish to cultivate her acquaintance. Besides, it so happens that I promised Mrs Hickman last week that I would take tea with her this afternoon, and she has invited several of our mutual friends to meet me.'

'Send a wire to say you cannot come,' suggested Jack.

'I have no intention of doing any such thing. If you choose to ask Mrs Denman to the house without consulting my convenience in the matter, the least you can do will be to devote yourself to her amusement.'

'It will seem so very rude if you are not at

home, Janie. People in the county are all taking her up.'

'That is no reason why I should.'

'I would not like her to think you stuck up,' said Jack. 'Just because of her antecedents, one is the more anxious to be polite to the poor little woman.'

'You can be as gushing as you like,' I replied. 'As for me,' I added, with considerable heat, 'you really cannot expect me always to stay indoors and never go anywhere on account of this hateful golf—for that is what it all comes to. I loath and detest it, as you know.'

'You are sadly unreasonable, Janie.'

'*You* say so, *I* think not. I am perfectly certain that any impartial person, if appealed to, would give the verdict in my favour.'

Then would follow an animated argument, conducted on the usual matrimonial lines. We both thought we were right; we neither of us would give in. As the result, a certain amount of bad blood was invariably engendered. It generally ended, however, in my having to give up my intended visit, for Jack was an adept in the art of getting his own way. I will do him justice there. By hook or by crook, he nearly always got what he wanted. But it may readily

be conceived that when my guest or guests arrived, I was hardly in a humour to receive them with effusion. As a rule, I had to tramp round and round the golf course with my visitors, pretending an interest in the odious game which I did not feel and never would, since I regarded it in the light of a deadly enemy. Still, even that was better than sitting hour after hour in a heated drawing-room, wearily cudgelling my brains for little platitudes and common-place remarks, and listening to them in return. I know nothing so absolutely exhausting; words fail to convey any adequate idea of the fatigue entailed.

It generally ended in our getting our boots and feet wet, and then we returned to the house, and there was a great fuss about changing, and all my old slippers were called into requisition. I kept a stock on purpose. Next came tea, assisted by more conversational platitudes. They were becoming rare and intermittent, in spite of my most heroic struggles. At length, to the universal relief of the ladies—for guests were often as bored as the entertainer—masculine voices were audible outside in the hall. Another quarter of an hour elapsed, during which the gentlemen refreshed themselves with various

spirituous beverages and long cigars, furnished by Jack. Finally a move was made by the assembled company. I breathed a sigh of thankfulness when the last visitor had taken his departure. Then Jack would enter the drawing-room, smelling of the mingled fumes of whisky and tobacco, and say,—

‘Well, Janie, dear, we have had a most delightful day, have we not? I don’t think I ever enjoyed myself much more. We played some capital rounds.’ I could not help looking, as I felt, glum, and not responding to this speech. It seemed unkind to damp his ardour, but I could not conscientiously pretend to any enjoyment. I envied him his. He was so bright and beaming, whereas I felt utterly done, and as limp as a rag. After the meaningless prattle of the last few hours, I longed for quietude, with a great longing which Jack would never understand, so it was no use talking about it. What I regretted most was the absolute waste of time. It might have been so much more profitably spent with the dear children or with an instructive book.

‘Why, Janie,’ Jack exclaimed, after a pause, ‘what is the matter with you?’

‘*Oh! nothing,*’ I answered, endeavouring to

stifle a yawn. 'I'm dead tired, that is all. Mr Snookham's female friends were not much of a success.'

'Tired!' cried Jack, in genuine surprise. 'What on earth have you had to tire you?'

'I have had two terribly dull women—whom I do not know from Adam, and with whom I have no ideas in common—on my hands for, let me see how many hours—'

And I made a feint to count them up on my fingers.

At this Jack got angry. 'Nonsense,' he said. 'Of all the unsociable people I ever came across in my life, you are the worst.'

'It is easy to make such an assertion when uncongenial society is forced upon you,' I responded tragically. 'Let me choose my own, and you will soon see if I am unsociable or not.'

'Why the deuce can't you be cheerful and friendly like other folk?'

'Because I am not constituted like them. I don't look upon life as a mere playground in which to amuse myself. Because little, frivolous games do not satisfy my aspirations. Because—because—oh! there are a hundred because's, if only you were capable of understanding them.'



'Come, don't put yourself into a temper, and say rude things to your husband.'

'I have no wish to say rude things, only you do irritate me at times, Jack. I entertain your friends at your bidding, and at the eleventh hour sacrifice all my individual arrangements in order to please you. I am civil—nobody can ever say that I am not civil—in my own house, but it is adding insult to injury to twit me for not being cheerful and friendly when I am doing violence to my personal inclinations, and going through a species of petty martyrdom. In the end; I shall be ill. I know I shall.' And I forced back a tear. Jack looked at me searchingly. His eyes were kind.

'Janie,' he said, 'sometimes I wonder what has come over you of late. Don't you really feel well, dear old girl? I ought to have remembered.'

'It signifies very little whether I feel well or not,' I interrupted hastily.

'My darling,' he said, 'don't talk like that. It estranges and saddens me.'

At this I took sudden fire. 'Does it never strike you,' I retorted, 'how admirably you have succeeded in saddening and estranging *me*, what with your horrid golf and one thing and another? *I declare I never have any peace nowadays.*'

Jack took a second long look at me, and, seeing my face sternly set, he walked out of the room without deigning to say another word. No doubt it was the wisest thing he could do, but I did not appreciate it at the time. I told myself that he was treating me exactly like a naughty child, who is left to recover from its tantrums as best it can. When he was gone, I flung my head down on a cushioned chair, and moaned, 'Oh! I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it. He used to be so nice, and now he is horrid, and—and—we are always quarrelling. It will kill me—it will kill me.'

But it didn't, of course. After a bit I came to my senses, and went upstairs to dress for dinner. During that meal we were both very silent and constrained. Pleading a bad headache, I retired to rest as soon as I could decently effect an escape. When Jack came up, he made a little conciliatory remark to me in a hushed voice. I heard it quite well, for I was wide awake, but I pretended to be fast asleep. The next day was a repetition of its predecessor—people, golf; golf, people. The constant unrest and lack of privacy had a most demoralising effect upon me. Never before had I realised the value of time. Now

I regularly idled my days away, and was most unhappy in consequence. My letters lay in heaps unanswered, my housekeeping was performed in a negligent and perfunctory manner, whilst my habits of neatness and order were gradually and insidiously being undermined. And all for golf! No wonder I hated it with an ardent hatred. I longed for a change; to escape from my surroundings and to be my own mistress once more. Perhaps I was morbidly sensitive, perhaps my state of health really demanded repose. I have not mentioned the fact before, but Jack was most anxious that we should have another little son. My expectations during the winter promised to be realised in the course of the summer. It was owing to this that, when Jack came to me one day and proposed that we should forego our annual trip to London, and bury ourselves in a remote Welsh village, possessing few attractions save its sand bunkers and natural golf course stretching for miles along the seashore, I offered no opposition.

‘You know, Janie,’ he argued artfully, his heart being set upon going, ‘it will do the kids such a lot of good; and as for you, you *can be just as quiet as you like there. You*

have been a little over-taxed with company lately.'

'But is not Aberhynlleth a dreadfully god-forsaken kind of place?' I asked.

'Oh, dear, no. George Donaldson spent his holiday there last year, and he writes me that it is an awfully jolly little crib.'

'From a golfer's point of view?' I inquired suspiciously.

'From every point of view,' said Jack confidently. 'The air is first-class, the scenery pretty, the roads good, and the golf course quite A1.'

'It will be very well for you,' I said, 'but I don't quite see what the children and I are to do with ourselves all day long.'

'You can bathe in the briny,' said Jack facetiously.

'Too early in the year,' I objected. 'The water would be as cold as ice.'

'You can mess about on the seashore to your heart's content,' he said.

I smiled faintly. The prospect did not offer any very special attraction. Nevertheless, I thought that the sea air might benefit the little ones, and so gave my consent to the project. We had pretty well decided to go to Aberhynlleth.

when one day, to my horror, Jack said, 'By the way, Janie, I saw Lady Marshall yesterday; she came over here whilst you were out. I happened to mention the Aberhynlleth plan to her in an incautious moment, and she immediately declared that, if we were thinking of taking a house, there was nothing on earth she would like so much as to join us.

'Jack,' I said decisively, 'that settles it. If Lady Marshall is to be of the party, I decline to accompany you to Aberhynlleth. Nothing would induce me to be in the same house with her. I—or rather you—would have no peace. It is like her impudence to propose a combination establishment.'

'Well, I must put her off, then. Only it seems somewhat of a shame, as Sir Eustace is going yachting with a friend, and she will be left in that great house all alone.'

'You can reserve your pity; she is quite capable of amusing herself in the absence of her lord and master. Anyhow, you are not called upon to take care of her; you have quite enough to do in that respect with your own belongings. Besides, Lady Marshall would bore you to extinction after the first day or two. She would *always be bothering you to play golf with her.*'

‘That I could not do. If she comes, she must distinctly understand that I intend to go in for real, not sham, golf.’

‘You had better tell her so,’ I said. ‘The notion of her joining us is perfectly preposterous, and as we neither of us desire her ladyship’s company, there can be no reason for being saddled with it.’

I stuck firmly to my determination not to go to Aberhynlleth if Lady Marshall was to take up her quarters with us, but to my unutterable dismay I found that she also adhered to hers. On the morning of our departure, she appeared at the railway station with her maid and a pile of luggage, and unblushingly told me that she proposed spending a few weeks in Wales for the purpose of improving her golf on the Aberhynlleth links. I might have suspected Jack of collusion, only he looked as much taken aback as I. She jumped into the same carriage with us, never even asking if we desired to retain our engaged compartment for ourselves. She was an exceedingly cool hand, as the saying goes, and I sat and gazed at her with mistrust. Somehow I felt that she was there for no good, and that mischief would inevitably result from her presence. Why did she insist on pursuing my husband long after he had made his

choice? My gorge rose with indignation as I listened to her idle chatter, and noted the glances she kept sending in Jack's direction. I was no longer quite as sure of him as formerly. The Lark episode had shaken my confidence. He had succumbed to temptation then, he might do so again. Already the green-eyed monster had laid his claw upon me.

## CHAPTER XVI

WE TRANSFER OURSELVES TO ABERHYNLLETH

DRIP, drip, drip. Water everywhere. Rain running in rivulets down the window panes and blotting out the landscape. Over sea and hill hung a dense grey mist, that limited the view and produced an intensely depressing effect upon the human spirits. A primitive little country station, guiltless of porters or conveyances, with a single set of rails running a mile further on than the main line, in order to carry certain trucks, laden with timber, to the diminutive wharf of the village of Aberhynlleth. This is what greeted our eyes on arrival, and I confess that a more damping dreary prospect it would be difficult to conceive. My heart sank at sight of it.

Jack dragged one of his leather portmanteaux under shelter, and made me sit down on it whilst he interviewed the functionary who did duty, apparently, as station-master. He questioned him eagerly as to our chances of getting a trap to take us to the hotel. Luckily we had taken



the precaution of engaging rooms beforehand. While he was still busy prosecuting his inquiries, a rumbling vehicle drove up, with an exceedingly red-faced driver seated on the box. It—the carriage—was like nothing so much as a huge dresstrunk set upon four high wheels. It boasted no windows, and the interior would have been pitch dark had it not been for the door. Its hinge was broken, and consequently the door refused to shut. We were informed with pomp that this was *the fly* of the place. We clambered into it, not without difficulty, Jack and I sitting on one side with the children between us, whilst their nurse and Lady Marshall sat opposite. I could not help smiling at that lady's face of disgust. She was evidently unused to travelling *en famille*. It was arranged that our luggage should be fetched by instalments and we therefore clung to our handbags, leaving the heavy baggage to follow. As we jolted along, we looked curiously out at the door to see what manner of place was Aberhynlleth.

At first, our road wound between two grey, stone walls. Above them, on the right, stretched the sad-coloured sea, studded with sand-banks, on which several cormorants and gulls lazily flapped their wings. It may be as well here to *explain* that Aberhynlleth was situated on an

estuary, the river Hynlleth running into the ocean opposite the village. At low tide it dwindled into insignificance, leaving considerable tracts of mud exposed. The shore was fringed with rounded hills, but it was almost impossible to distinguish them to-day, so low did the mist hang. On our left rose some rugged rocks, overgrown in places with coarse grass and stunted trees. The little road ran curving on, until a few cottages, built of grey stone, hove in sight. Presently these gave place to a row of houses bearing the high-sounding appellation of Seaview Mansions. Next we spied the Post Office, hemmed in between a small grocery and a drapery shop. They were followed by a fancy wool repository and a toy warehouse. In the latter, a number of little pails and wooden spades were displayed. Then the building on the right disappeared, and gave way to a clumsily-built wooden pier, alongside of which some Norwegian timber ships were lying. We came to a halt before an exceedingly modest-looking hostelry, which rejoiced in the name of 'The Golfer's Home.' It took Jack's fancy at once. We descended, and were greeted by a pleasant-faced young woman, with a couple of very small children trailing at her

skirts. She advanced to meet us, and introduced herself as the proprietress—Mrs Evan Williams. The next thing was to see our rooms. These like the weather, were remarkably dispiriting, being dark and stuffy. They smelt as if the windows had not been opened for years, and were almost blocked up by enormous old-fashioned bedsteads, hung all round with a dingy chintz. It was easy to see at a glance that the whole establishment was primitive in the extreme. It boasted of only one girl, whose duties, it quickly appeared, were so multifarious that she was unable to perform any of them in a thorough and satisfactory manner. Jack and I exchanged looks.

‘It will have to do for to-night,’ I whispered. ‘To-morrow we can go out and hunt for lodgings, but it is too late now to coast about.’

Lady Marshall was amusing. She inspected all the rooms in turn, and vowed she could not sleep in any of them. After making a variety of audible remarks, nicely calculated to hurt Mrs Williams’ feelings, she nevertheless selected the largest and most cheerful apartment, and left the rest of the party to shake down as best they might. We were tired after our day’s *travelling*, and I do not think that any of us

were greatly impressed by our first view of Aberhynlleth. Even Jack seemed rather sober, and the reality evidently did not quite come up to his expectations, although he maintained that things would surely wear a different complexion on the morrow. A plain but excellent dinner, consisting of soup, fresh fish, roast ducks and apple tart, served to revive us in a measure. We felt less despondent after we had satisfied our hunger, and more inclined to take a sanguine view of the situation. But when we returned to the little comfortless sitting-room, with its hard chairs, big centre table and dirty cloth, we suffered a relapse.

‘What a hole!’ exclaimed Jack. ‘I wonder what the dickens George Donaldson could have been about to recommend such a place.’

‘He did not stay here,’ I said. ‘I distinctly remember that he said in his letter he took rooms. That is what we shall have to do.’

After a while, Jack went out to smoke a cigar and pick up what information he could about the golf course, leaving Lady Marshall and me to our own devices. As soon as he was gone, she made no further attempt to converse, but, flinging herself down on the only sofa in the sitting-room, went fast asleep. I was rather

grateful to her than otherwise, although her manners certainly did not impress me as being particularly fine. Presently I stole off to bed, and so ended our first evening together. It might have been worse had her ladyship felt conversationally inclined.

On the following day the sun shone brightly, and in consequence, everything assumed a more cheerful aspect than on the previous afternoon. Immediately after breakfast, I sallied out with Jack in search of lodgings, and we succeeded in finding some modest but comfortable apartments, which seemed likely to answer our purpose. Lady Marshall displayed considerable anxiety to occupy our only spare bedroom, but I distinctly gave her to understand that this was impossible, since I expected my aunt to join us at the beginning of the week. I had invited her to relieve my solitude, as I knew that I should not get much of Jack's society. I congratulated myself on having got rid of Lady Marshall, but my satisfaction was somewhat sobered when she ensconced herself next door, where she could watch over all our goings out and comings in. Of course, golf with her was a mere pretence. Jack was the game she *pursued* in reality; I was well aware of that

fact. To do the woman justice, I believe she was fond of him, as far as she was capable of being fond of anyone apart from herself. Her conduct, however, struck me as so indelicate and so utterly lacking in feminine modesty that her affection, unlike Miss Lark's, inspired no sympathy in my breast.

Meanwhile, the children were mad with delight. The wharf and timber yard, although by no means beautiful objects in themselves, promised to furnish them inexhaustible amusement. They refused to tear themselves away, so, having a variety of purchases to make, I left them in charge of their nurse, and went the round of the principal shops, ordering in eatables for the day's meals. This done, Jack proposed that we should walk to the golf ground, which, he had ascertained, lay almost opposite the station. Not having secured a masculine partner as yet, he graciously acceded to Lady Marshall's request that he would play with her. So we three started, Sandy walking behind us with the clubs. I had suggested leaving our major-domo at home, but Sandy had contrived to render himself so essential to Jack's well-being and comfort, that my better half declared he could not possibly dispense with his services.

He therefore accompanied the expedition, and I gave my maid a holiday, depending on nurse for any assistance I might require.

As we walked along, Lady Marshall, who had recovered from her taciturn mood of the night before, sustained most of the conversation. For my own part, I always felt tongue-tied and ill at ease in her presence. She stifled me, and had the knack of making me appear to worst advantage. Perhaps it was because I was conscious of the deteriorating power she exercised over me that I disliked her so much. Anyhow, I maintained a resolute silence.

'It really is awfully good of you to play with me, Mr Calthorpe,' she began insinuatingly. 'I shall enjoy a round with you so much.'

'I don't mind playing one game just to make the acquaintance of the course,' responded Jack, ungallantly enough. 'After that, I have no doubt you will be tired, and then Sandy and I can have a proper set-too.'

She did not altogether appreciate this speech, as I could see from the sudden deepening of the lines about her mouth; but she said, with every outward appearance of amiability, 'Oh! of course. A mere beginner at golf, like myself, *cannot expect* to monopolise all your time. If

you will condescend to give me a lesson now and again, I shall rest more than content.'

Jack seemed rather relieved at the reasonableness of this request, for he rejoined, in a far more amiable tone, 'All right; that shall be a bargain.'

We had now reached the station, and discovered that it was necessary to cross the rails. This we did, and after walking on some very soft sand for about fifty yards, we arrived at the first teeing ground. Jack's enthusiasm was promptly aroused by the sight of two gentlemen in the act of driving off. The first shot was not a particularly nice one, apparently. On the left lay the sea and a line of rather formidable-looking sand bunkers; to the right ran the railroad. It required very steady driving to carry the ball exactly to the desired point—a stretch of fairly smooth grass some hundred and thirty or forty yards distant from the teeing ground. Between it and the first green was a sandy flat, sprinkled with round, white pebbles, which were most deceiving to the eye, as they bore a strong resemblance to the ball. If the driver's stroke fell at all short of its destination, a vast amount of time was spent in searching for his missing Silvertown. The two gentlemen ahead



of us were evidently novices at the game. After putting themselves into the most extraordinary postures, aiming, and wagging their clubs for quite five minutes, they both made remarkably bad shots, which seemed the worse for so much preliminary preparation. Indeed, I could not help laughing outright when they lost their balls among the white pebbles and moved on in search of them. This delayed Jack's start, and he good-naturedly joined in the hunt, and by so doing made the acquaintance of the players. He possessed a veritable talent for making friends, and I knew that, before many days had passed, we should be on speaking terms with the whole of the golfing community of Aberhynlleth. At last Jack found both the missing balls, thanks to a pair of extra sharp eyes, and then the strangers proceeded joyfully on their way, leaving the ground free for their successors. Lady Marshall now stepped on to the teeing ground, whilst Sandy took a pinch of sand between his fingers, and squeezing it into the shape of a small pyramid, placed it at her feet in the orthodox fashion. I think I have mentioned already that she was an unusually tall, strongly-made woman, and she stood well up to her ball. Considering her

sex, she had a very fair notion of the game. After taking a careful, but not too prolonged aim, she managed to catch the ball just right, and sent it flying almost out of sight.

‘Bravo!’ ejaculated Jack, in unfeigned admiration. ‘I had no idea you could hit so well. If you play like that, you will be turning the tables upon me, and giving your humble servant points, instead of he you.’

She flushed like a girl at his praise. From where I stood, I could distinctly see how her face lit up when he addressed her in these accents of commendation. Sandy also expressed his approval of her ladyship’s performance, and when she vacated the teeing ground, she was on very fair terms with herself. Somehow, when it came to Jack’s turn to play, he muffed it horribly. Then he got into a sand bunker, from which it took four shots to get free. Meanwhile, his adversary continued to follow up her advantage, and soon placed the first hole to her credit. I could see that she had risen enormously in his estimation. The pair were much too engrossed by their game to pay any attention to me. I felt what I was, a supernumerary, and plodded behind in their footsteps.

The course consisted of eighteen holes—nine out and nine back. Some of them were a long way apart, and in order to cover the entire distance, one had to walk at least five or six miles. When the players came to the third hole, I sat down and declared I could go no further. This third hole was an extremely difficult one, it appeared. An enormous sand hill, nick-named 'The Virgin,' barred the golfer's progress. If he hit his ball from the teeing ground very high in the air and very far, well and good; but woe betide the hapless player if eye and hand served him false. Then the ball went flying against 'The Virgin's' precipitous sides, only to roll back, back, back, almost to the starting point; or else it became so deeply embedded in the loose sand at the base, that it required dozens of shots to dislodge it. Jack had not been accustomed to so formidable a bunker. It was a novel experience to him, and he stood and gazed at 'The Virgin' in dismay. At home, he had never encountered anything stiffer than Morton's blackthorn hedge. Both he and Lady Marshall made repeated essays to loft their ball over, but they failed signally in their attempts. Whilst they were thus engaged, a pair of practised players ap-

peared on the scene. Jack was ashamed of his bad play, and, therefore, begged the newcomers not to wait on him. They gladly availed themselves of his permission to proceed, and then, for the first time, I began to understand something of the skill and precision demanded by the time-honoured game of golf.

It was wonderful to see the manner in which these two men wielded their clubs, took accurate aim, and then, with a dexterous backward swing, sent the ball flying surely and easily over the great sand hill in their front.

‘If only we could do that!’ sighed Lady Marshall, when the strangers had disappeared behind the crest of ‘The Virgin.’

‘We will,’ said Jack doggedly. ‘I shall never rest satisfied until I do.’

He was as good as his word, and after about a dozen attempts, finally succeeded in overcoming the difficulty.

‘Come,’ he said to Lady Marshall, whose prospects of imitating his example appeared very far off, ‘it won’t do for us to stick here all the day. We must move on and have a look at the remainder of the course. You can practise by yourself to-morrow morning, but it is a very long shot for a lady. I am afraid

you will never get over in one stroke, if you try till Doomsday.' And so saying, Jack handed his driving iron to Sandy.

She set her teeth in a way which made her jaw look square and pugilistic.

'I'll do it,' she said. 'I *won't* be beaten, especially by you.'

He laughed, and was about to move on when, catching sight of me, he stopped and said, 'Are you coming any further with us, Janie?'

'I can't,' I answered; 'I'm dead tired. I will sit here until you return.'

Lady Marshall gave one of her beaming smiles, which I detest. She is never so much to be dreaded as when she purrs.

'Dear Mrs Calthorpe,' she said, pretending an anxiety which I knew she did not feel, 'are you not afraid of catching cold? I fear we may not be back for ever so long. You will get weary of waiting.'

I did not deign to reply to this speech, made purposely to annoy me. I gave her a cold glance, then settled myself resolutely in a sand bunker, where a protruding ledge of grass formed a rest for my back. Jack was nice. Jack came to my side for a moment, and said, in a

caressing voice, 'Good-bye, little woman. Take care of yourself in our absence.'

They were meaningless words, since, had he chosen, he need not have left me to my own resources. Nevertheless, I valued them. They showed he was not completely occupied with Lady Marshall.

## CHAPTER XVII

### SEEKING FOR SYMPATHY

I HAVE no wish to say a word against Aberhynlleth. I have not the slightest doubt but what, from the golfer's point of view, it was a perfect Elysium — a regular little Garden of Eden ; but it must be confessed that, for the non-golfer, it was just about as dull a hole as could well be found on the face of this earth. There was no band, no promenade, no pier or place of amusement. The one excitement was to play — or, as Jack more fitly described it, mess about on the sands, morning, noon and night. Now, although the process possesses infinite charm for the infantine mind, it is scarcely equally attractive to the grown-up one, more especially if the weather be cold and inclined to rain. Personally, I found time hang somewhat heavy on my hands. I missed all my home avocations and comforts. To my great tribulation, it appeared there was no circulating library in Aberhynlleth. Books were a *commodity* but seldom asked for, it seemed. My

principal occupation consisted in toddling round to the butcher and baker of a forenoon, and ordering in the day's comestibles. But the afternoon was hard to pass, as a rule. Lady Marshall and Jack were always on the golf ground. They generally started directly after breakfast, and, taking their luncheon with them, would not return until six or seven o'clock in the evening, when, as may be easily imagined, they were pretty well tired out with their exertions. Jack enjoyed himself amazingly. His appetite was something phenomenal, and he looked the picture of robust health. He had scraped acquaintance with all the male golfers who had come to Aberhynlleth for the sake of its course, and almost every day they made up fresh matches with one another. Lady Marshall displayed such an aptitude for the game, and improved with such rapid strides, that she was admitted to the majority of the foursomes. She and Jack were thus constantly thrown together. I heard from an indirect source that she was frequently taken for my husband's wife. People were not even aware of my humble existence. I felt a complete cipher, and a sense of isolation grew strong upon me. Vainly I tried to combat it. My spirits drooped I became morbid



and introspective—a horrible word which means horrible things, for when analysed it is a combination of Vanity and Egoism.

At the commencement of our stay at Aberhynlleth, I endeavoured to struggle round a hole or two of the course as a spectator, but I soon found myself debarred from walking any distance, and therefore perforce desisted from the attempt. I spent many hours in absolute solitude, as my aunt, to whose arrival I had been looking forward, wrote, much to my regret, deferring her visit for a fortnight. She had brought me up, and been an apology of a mother to me in my orphan youth, and I entertained a very sincere regard for her. She was not precisely a lovable woman; had she been so, I should probably have been fonder of her than I was, but she was an eminently shrewd, practical and worldly one. I mean worldly in the best sense of the word. She possessed a wide experience of life, and, by a certain natural insight into character, summed both men and women up in a manner which rendered her judgments nearly always correct. I longed to tell her all my doubts and surmises respecting Lady Marshall, against whom my *irritation* daily increased. I may have been

foolish and utterly in the wrong, but what wife really caring for her husband, and valuing his affection, would sit by with folded hands and allow an artful, bold, designing person to studiously make love to him, with the deliberate intention of rendering him unfaithful? There! I have mentioned the ungenerous thoughts that filled my mind about this period. As far as I was concerned, it was a truly unhappy one, for these thoughts left me no peace, and intruded on every occasion. It was with difficulty that I could keep my self-control in Lady Marshall's presence. The sight of her was fast becoming as a red rag to a bull to me. The enmity which had always existed between us threatened at any moment to break into an active flame. We walked, as it were, on a volcano.

To do Jack justice, I do not believe he had the slightest inkling of the state of affairs. After my first remonstrances, I was too proud to complain. He imagined, dear, unobservant man, that I was enjoying myself after a quiet fashion. He was a little flattered by her ladyship's advances, but he did not let them disturb his equanimity. I did not fear him so much as I feared her, for I knew her to be thoroughly selfish and unscrupulous.

The woman hated me; and never lost the opportunity of inflicting a pin prick. She smiled and purred in a way which quite deceived Jack, and then made some sarcastic speech, whose sting was totally unperceived by my good, obtuse hubby, but which set me quivering with indignation. To enlighten him was to place myself at a disadvantage. There was nothing to do but to bear her impertinences and not give her the satisfaction of seeing how much they wounded me. But the part was hard to play. I doubted my ability of doing so when every day that passed added to the grudge I owed her.

'If Jack cares for such a woman as that, he can't care in the very least for me,' I mused. 'Lady Marshall and I are as different as the two poles. Yet she seems gradually to be acquiring a kind of influence over him.'

I was very cold to Jack, and treated him with a hauteur and reserve which were slowly establishing a considerable barrier between us. I nursed my past wrongs until the present ones assumed unbearable proportions. I told myself that, if Jack chose to leave me all alone day after day for the sake of Lady Marshall, *whom* I not only disliked, but despised, I would

not move hand or foot to recall him to my side. He should be absolutely unfettered as regarded his choice, but if that were adverse to me, I would never forgive him. He was wilfully and deliberately trampling on all my holiest feelings. Jack was a dear in many respects, but he had not a notion of the subtle, complex twists of the female nature. That was where he invariably broke down in his relations with me. He did not understand the inner life, and, with many good points, was sadly deficient in observation and penetration. Why, for instance, did he take it for granted I did not mind being alone when I did? Why would he persist in imagining I was happy when I wasn't? If only he had taken the trouble to dive below the surface! But he was too occupied with that hateful golf and his own amusements to have any eyes for me. My confidence in him was already shaken, as the reader knows. I had never quite recovered from the shock occasioned by the Miss Lark incident. I said to myself, 'He is no longer dependable. There is no knowing what he may not do behind my back; and now that I am not strong, he is quite capable of taking advantage of the situation. That woman will end by twisting him

round her little finger, I know she will. In that case'—forcing back a sob—'I will not trouble him any more—no! I will not trouble him.' I was in this agitated and unreasonable frame of mind when my Aunt Selina arrived. I looked to her for support. She, surely, would take my part.

'Why, Janie,' she exclaimed, as soon as we were alone together, 'whatever is the matter with you? You don't look a bit well.'

'I don't feel well,' I responded, in tragic tones of self-pity.

'Ah! you poor child. Perhaps it is only natural in the circumstances. You never were a giantess for strength, but you will be all right by-and-by.'

'Aunt Selina,' I said solemnly, 'do you mind listening to me? I have something to tell you—something that has been preying on my mind for a long time.'

'Good gracious, Janie, what has gone wrong?'

'I—I am well enough physically. It is not that that ails me. It is my mental state which reduces me to a condition of misery.'

'Your mental state, child! What do you *mean*?'

I smiled, with a certain mournful pleasure. 'Do not be afraid, Aunt Selina. I am not going mad—at least, not just at present, although sometimes I feel as if I might end my days in a lunatic asylum. The long and the short of it is, I am miserable to a degree. I wish I were dead.'

'Rubbish!' ejaculated my companion. 'The people who say such things never mean them. They are a sign of weakness. Don't let me hear you talk such nonsense again; it's both wrong and cowardly. You have a husband and family.'

'Yes,' I said, a little taken aback by Aunt Selina's manner, which showed entire disapproval of my speech, 'I have, but I am miserable all the same.'

I thought you were so happy with Jack?' she said, in tones of genuine surprise.

'I was, but I am so no longer.'

'Then I expect it is your own doing. No woman ever had a kinder, more indulgent husband. In fact, if Jack had a fault in the eyes of his friends, it was that he spoilt you.'

'No one could accuse him of over-indulgence now,' I sobbed in return. 'The fact of the matter is, we have been getting on awfully badly of late.'

My aunt's face took on an expression of concern. She saw that I was in earnest. Hitherto she had treated my remarks with comparative levity.

'I am sorry to hear this, Janie. What is amiss between you two?'

'Oh!' I exclaimed impatiently, 'it all comes from that abominable golf. Ever since Jack took to it, my life has been simply wretched.'

'Now, Janie, please do not make use of such extravagant language. It is both childish and foolish, and prevents my grasping the real facts.'

'The real facts are precisely as I state them. In olden days, no woman could possibly have had a better husband than I. Jack was always ready to go about with me—to walk, visit or drive as I desired—'

'He was an idle man,' interrupted Aunt Selina. 'You have often twitted him in my presence for dawdling away his time.'

'He dawdles it away now. You can't call playing an idiotic game from morning till night an occupation for a *man*?' And I managed to infuse an immense amount of contempt into the final word.

My aunt shrugged her shoulders. 'It is

impossible to judge everybody in this world by one's own standards. If one does, one runs the danger of becoming terribly narrow and illiberal in one's views.' And she looked at me sharply. I felt myself blushing beneath her penetrating gaze. The question under discussion, presented thus, bore a somewhat novel aspect.

'But,' I stammered, 'surely a man ought to do better with his life.'

'Undoubtedly, but we all fail in that respect. There is nothing to prevent the lives of most men and women from being noble, yet how few are so in reality. It is hard to find fault with your husband on that account. He has not been well. He is recruiting his health. Is not this a more charitable way of looking at the situation, my dear?'

I hung my head. Then, as my numerous wrongs once more unfolded themselves like a panorama before my mind, I said eagerly, 'Oh! Aunt Selina, that is not it. Can't you see? Don't you understand? I wrote you about Lady Marshall; she and Jack are constantly together. They spend hours in each other's society. I never see anything of him nowadays.'

Aunt Selina's face cleared. She burst out



laughing, much to my perturbation. It seemed to me that her jocularities were out of place. It jarred upon my susceptibilities, which just now were rather in a high-strung condition.

'I don't see anything to laugh at,' I said, in my most dignified manner.

She put her hand on my shoulder. 'So ho! Jane, now we are coming to the bottom of this terribly tragic business. You are jealous, are you? I suspected as much from your letters. The truth is, you are too ridiculously fond of that great Jack of yours.' And she beamed upon me.

I withdrew from the touch of her hand. In my innermost consciousness I admitted that I was jealous—horribly jealous—of Jack, but that other people should guess at the fact wounded my pride in the highest degree. So I said coldly, 'I don't exactly know what you mean by being jealous, Aunt Selina. If a woman cares for her husband in the least, I fail to see how she can help feeling it when he neglects her for the sake of another.'

'I want to ask one question. Is Jack neglecting you seriously and intentionally? From what I gather, he is acting rather with a strong *man's* customary want of consideration, and in-

ability to understand the morbid conditions of mind produced by ill health. He feels well himself, and fancies you do also.'

'That is no reason why he should spend hours of every day careering over the golf ground with Lady Marshall,' I rejoined.

'No, but, all the same, it is natural. We cannot judge men as we judge ourselves. They are differently constituted. I do not want to lecture you, Janie,' my aunt went on, 'and, of course, I know that for the present you are not able to take part in Jack's pursuits; but do you not think that you are just—' and she paused, as if to give weight to her words—'well, just a little unwise to set your face as sternly against golf as you do? After all, it is harmless. He might have taken to many worse things—betting, gambling, etc.'

'I loathe and detest golf,' I said excitedly. 'If it were a serpent, nothing would delight me more than to bruise its head under my heel. Say what you like to the contrary, all my difficulties are entirely owing to it. How, therefore, can I pretend to tolerate my worst enemy?'

'Tut! tut! You exaggerate things in the most absurd way. If only you would unbend a little, and pretend to take some kind of interest in the

game, even if you did not feel it, you and Jack would be drawn a good deal nearer to one another, I am positive. Your conduct alienates his sympathies.'

'I cannot dissemble,' I said doggedly. 'It is not in my nature.'

'It is in every woman's nature to make the best of the situation if she chooses. There is a great difference between dissembling and exercising a justifiable tact. All men, even the best of them, require a certain amount of management. In my opinion, Janie, that is where you have failed.'

'It's wonderfully easy for a third person to pronounce sentence 'twixt husband and wife,' I said stiffly. 'They don't understand that there are always wheels within wheels.'

'No doubt,' responded Aunt Selina, 'but it strikes me very forcibly that Jack only takes up with this Lady Marshall because you refuse to listen to what he has to say about his favourite amusement.'

'Refuse to listen to his golf jargon!' I exclaimed, in tones of sarcasm. 'You little know what I have endured throughout the winter. I declare to you, Aunt Selina, that my unfortunate head is one medley of nib-

licks, drives, iron shots, etc., etc. You can have no idea how wearisome such talk is. In process of time it simply sickens one.' And I gave a shudder of disgust.

'Foolish child!' ejaculated my companion. 'Why will you persist in making mountains out of molehills? Believe me, it is bad policy, and you are already beginning to find out the effects of it. What does it matter? To be quite frank, Jack's conversation never rises to any high intellectual level. You know that as well as I. Whether he chats of golf, hunting, horses or hounds makes very little real difference. You must take people as you find them. He is the best and dearest of mortals, but he is not a genius.'

## CHAPTER XVIII

### GOOD ADVICE

I FLUSHED indignantly. I had often said as much to myself, but that was no reason why I should allow other people to say so. And, after all, if Jack were not very clever, it did not signify. He was one of those nice, genial personages who, by their brightness and sunniness of disposition, are better than all the crochety geniuses ever born. I did not like hearing him disparaged, even by Aunt Selina, who knew us both intimately. I would suffer no disparagement of Jack's ability. So I drew myself up, and said,—

‘There is not the slightest occasion for us to discuss my husband's intellectual endowments. He is quick enough and clever enough for me, at anyrate. I make no complaints on that score. As for myself,’ I went on angrily, ‘I am sorry I mentioned my troubles to you. A married woman should always keep them to *herself*, but I was so foolish as to suppose you

would seek to comfort me, instead of going out of your way to wound my feelings.' And, so saying, I suddenly burst into tears.

Aunt Selina caught one of my hands in hers and pressed it.

'You poor, silly girl,' she said. 'Really, Jane, in spite of your twenty-six years, you are little better than a baby in many respects. Why cannot you recognise that it is next door to impossible for people who have been married the best part of ten years to live in a constant state of fever heat?'

'I do not see why they shouldn't. I love Jack just as dearly now as I did the day I married him; much more so, indeed, for I was then only an ignorant child, possessing no knowledge of the world. Now I know how to value him.'

'Or flatter yourself that you do,' put in Aunt Selina. 'I don't wish to be unkind, but I feel it my duty to warn you that nothing bores and estranges a man so much as the jealousy of his wife, especially when she takes to showing it about every trifle. It drives him into practices of deception.'

I stretched out my hands, as if to ward off a blow. Her words sent a chill to my heart. Was she tormenting me on purpose, or was it

only that she took a kind of cat-like cruelty in inflicting pain? Never had I liked my aunt so little as at this moment, and yet reason told me that her trenchant remarks were not without a certain cold, hard truth of their own. That was what rendered them so cutting. I gave a half groan.

‘So you think that I bore Jack, and have already succeeded in estranging his affections?’ I said faintly. ‘It is better to know the worst.’

Aunt Selina hesitated, then she said, ‘I do not say that you *have* done so, but that you run the danger of doing so if you persist in your present attitude of coldness and opposition. Moreover, I think you expect too much.’

‘In what way, may I ask?’

‘Jack is as fond of you as any man can well be of his wife. Anybody can see that with half an eye; but he is full of health and spirits, and can hardly be expected to spend all his time trailing after the skirts of a delicate woman. You would not wish to henpeck him, I suppose?’

‘Of course not. I should hate the very idea.’

‘Precisely; yet some of his friends declare that he is too much under the ascendancy of *petticoats* for his own welfare. They would

prefer to see him assert himself more, and be freer altogether.'

I coloured hotly. 'It can make no difference to them. And please, Aunt Selina, if you are only intent on repeating disagreeable sayings, I would much rather not hear them. They embitter one's mind generally.'

'I am endeavouring to divert your mind into a healthier channel, and to show you that Jack is not considered a neglectful husband by the world at large. As for Lady Marshall, your dislike warps your judgment, blinds your eyes and renders you unusually prejudiced. She has her good points.'

'Enough!' I exclaimed, withdrawing my hand from the one that still detained it. 'I made a great mistake, and regret having been so weak as to crave your sympathy. You are hard and narrow in your views, and do not know what affection means. You take a pleasure in repulsing me, but I have learnt my lesson, although somewhat late in the day, and will never more bore you with confidences. What I feel—what I suffer is nothing to you.'

Aunt Selina looked searchingly at me, and her sharp, brown eyes were kindlier than her words, if only I had met them fully. But I



evaded their glance, and would not let myself be mollified by their expression.

'My dear,' she said, 'I am neither as unkind nor yet as unsympathetic as you imagine. Youth is a stormy period. Very few women pass through the first few years of their married life without experiencing some of the trials from which you are now suffering. But it is false kindness to encourage feelings of resentment. You have worked yourself up into a state of mind which, what with not being very well and one thing and another, has rendered you hysterical. If I strengthened your aversion to Lady Marshall by any words of mine, I should be doing you a mischief. You do not see it in that light now, but you will later on, when your brain has once more regained its normal equilibrium. These alarms are purely chimerical, in my opinion. Jack cares nothing for Lady Marshall; his love is entirely yours.'

I shook my head mournfully, although the words gave birth to a vague pleasure. 'You think so?' To myself I said, 'She does not know all. She does not know how I have been deceived and left for the first pretty face.'

'If you are a wise woman,' went on Aunt *Selina*, 'you will do your very best to keep

your husband's love. I should recommend you to give up dwelling quite so much on your own sensations and fancied injuries. The habit grows, and is not likely to conduce to your well-being. Rather remember that most married women have something to put up with, and that you are a great better deal off than the majority.'

'Very few of them are really happy,' I said reflectively. 'They pretend to be because they are obliged, but they are not.'

Aunt Selina turned upon me with a gesture of impatience. 'Happiness!' she cried. 'The word fills me with scorn. To begin with, what *is* happiness? How can you define it? Secondly, why should you and I expect it? What have we done to deserve perfect bliss? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Our mission in the world is to progress, to move on, to improve ourselves and others; not to whine and shed tears of weak self-pity because we do not happen to have everything we want. Mere personal happiness is a mean thing to let the brain continually harp upon. You are a little fool, Janie, and what you want in your relations with Jack is wisdom.'

'I am hardly responsible if an unkind Fate

saw fit to bring me into the world an idiot,' I retorted stiffly ; for I was deeply wounded by the manner in which Aunt Selina had received my confidences. I had made sure that she would pour forth the healing balm of her pity upon me, instead of which she did nothing but promulgate home truths with such stunning force and directness that I felt quite incapable of assimilating them.

'The wise woman,' continued my aunt, following up her advantage, 'bends herself to the inevitable. She is pliable and adaptive, yet manages to retain a considerable influence over her male surroundings of which they are frequently totally unaware. They are tools in her hands whilst she appears to be so in theirs, but she never for one moment allows them to suspect the fact.'

'An odious character !' I sneered. 'I would not resemble your "wise woman" for worlds. To my thinking, she is beneath contempt. There is nothing honest about her. She is perpetually lying and acting a part.'

Aunt Selina looked temporarily disconcerted, but soon recovered her self-possession. She was not one to be moved by a few angry words.

'Granted that Jack's talk about golf is apt

to become wearisome at times,' she said; 'is that a sufficient reason for you to set yourself up in opposition? Don't you see that you only weaken your hold over him by doing so?'

I made no immediate reply to this speech. In truth, I was too sore and hot to carry on the discussion. I felt that to prolong it would but incense me, and that, however well-intentioned my companion's advice might be, in my present state of mind it only produced a distinctly irritating effect. Hitherto I had entertained a great respect for Aunt Selina and her opinions, but now it seemed to me that in the interval of our last meeting she had grown curiously hard and narrow. She had accused me of being limited in my views, but had she no sympathy to bestow? Did she really think me a poor, hysterical fool, as she had given me to understand throughout our interview? I shut my lips resolutely, so as to prevent the angry flow of words that rose to them from escaping. Turning my back, I walked to the window. It looked over the estuary, and right down the full length of the little main street. Far off I could see Jack and Lady Marshall returning from the links. They marched along side by side, whilst a little in the rear were two youths of about

twenty, with whom they had been playing a foursome. Instinctively I hid behind the curtains as the party approached. I had no desire for them to see me spying upon them. When they came to our front door, they stopped. How cheery their voices sounded! Their owners stood some minutes making arrangements for the morrow. The young men were good golfers, and Jack liked playing with them. Several times my husband's laugh rang out clear and strong. I envied him his light-heartedness, and yet it angered me in a way. How easily he shuffled all the responsibilities of life from his shoulders. How lightly he took things; games — perpetual games, with an admixture of sport—and apparently every aspiration was satisfied. Flourishing, healthy, lucky animal! Against my will he commanded admiration. His nerves and his body were so thoroughly sound, whereas mine— Bah! what was the use of thinking? It led to nothing. My semi-intelligence did not possess sufficient genius to probe the mysteries of existence. Why, then, bother my aching head about them? I sighed heavily. Everything seemed so difficult and incomprehensible. It was a relief now *and again* to come across a simple nature like

Jack's. These twists and turns, these changes and caprices were insufferable. As I stood behind the curtains, my eyes fixed on the quartette beneath them, I hated myself. Aunt Selina's words were burning into my soul. Everybody thought me in the wrong. What a miserable failure I was, to be sure! Jack and Lady Marshall shook hands cordially with the strangers; they were evidently on quite intimate terms.

'Will you not come in for a few minutes and see the wife?' inquired Jack of her ladyship, after the youths had departed. 'I expect she is at home.'

'I am afraid I should only bore Mrs Calthorpe,' was her response. 'It is a great grief to me, but, in spite of all my efforts at friendship, I cannot succeed in getting into your wife's good graces. She persists in regarding me as her natural enemy. I wish—I do wish she would like me better than she does. I am sure it is not for want of trying on my part.'

Abominable hypocrite! No, I mean *wise woman*! I crimsoned with scorn as I overheard the remark. What had she ever done, forsooth, to conciliate me? And this was how

she gained Jack over to her side, and made him believe that the fault was all mine. She was, indeed, a snake in the grass. I had always suspected her treachery, now I had positive proof of it. In olden days I had done my very best to make friends with her, but from the first she had repelled my advances, sneering at me behind a mask of outward politeness. And now, when she knew as well as I that we were at daggers drawn, that her presence was distasteful to me, that it embittered my days and made me wretched, here she was coolly telling innocent Jack that she had systematically striven to win my regard, and only failed owing to my surliness. Jack shuffled his feet uncomfortably, but did not make any reply to her ladyship's speech. He was so honest and straightforward himself that he easily believed what other people said. Lady Marshall smiled up into his face, and let her cat-like, green eyes, rest tenderly upon his countenance. 'I shall see you to-morrow,' she said. 'That is—if your poor little wife will give you leave to come. I fancy I am horribly in her bad books for carrying you off so often. She is a wee bit jealous of your humble servant, I fancy. *Married* women should get over that sort of

thing. It makes them ridiculous in the eyes of their friends.'

'I do not think you give Sir Eustace much cause to complain,' rejoined Jack. '*He*, at least, is not troubled with a jealous wife. As for mine, she is perfect. Please understand that once for all, else we shall fall out.'

God bless him! How I loved him for those words; and yet the woman had an influence over him, I could see. He might pretend to ignore her spiteful sayings, but they left their mark nevertheless. For years she had been our evil genius, ever ready to foster any little disagreement that might exist between us. And yet most men called her 'a good sort'!

She laughed rather awkwardly in answer to Jack's last remark, and, changing the conversation with female dexterity, said, 'By the way, do you know that I have drawn you as my partner in Saturday's handicap?'

'No; have you?' said Jack, none too responsively.

'Yes. What time ought we to start?'

'We should be on the ground by ten o'clock sharp,' he said. 'I will call for you at five-and-twenty minutes to ten, if you like.'

'Thank you very much; I will be ready.'



So saying, she put out her hand, and I noted how she let it linger in his whilst she uttered a few more parting injunctions, which I failed to catch.

The next minute, Jack came bounding up the stairs. 'Janie,' he cried, 'Janie, where are you, little woman? I have seen nothing of you since the morning.'

But I had fled to my bedroom, and made no response. He left me for so many hours every day that it could not possibly hurt him, if I left him for a few minutes. He might enjoy a talk with Aunt Selina, and listen to all her wise sayings. If they hurt him as much as they had done me, they would do him no end of good. This was how I reasoned. Meanwhile, I knew that there was a great deal of truth in my aunt's remarks, but I was not in a condition to profit by her advice. I still considered myself the injured party, and could not unbend just because I was told to do so. It seemed to me that I was not wanted, that my presence acted as a check on Jack's and Lady Marshall's free enjoyment, and that if I were to leave them to their own devices I should not be missed in the least. These thoughts *served still* further to embitter my mind. I

was very, very unhappy, but, according to Aunt Selina, I had no right to expect anything else. Progress, not Happiness, was the law of the Universe. How complex and difficult was Life, and more especially the relationships of Man and Woman! If a woman loved, her feelings were for ever being trampled upon. She was dubbed indiscreet, unwise, jealous! Her husband might wander as a bee among flowers, sipping sweets from each one that took his fancy, but, even whilst her heart was breaking, it was incumbent on her never to make the slightest sign. If she weakly showed a trace of the grief which gnawed her vitals, then she lost caste. But if, on the contrary, she hid every emotion, and simply lied and acted, then she gained the approval of her neighbours. Unfortunate Woman! A hard part is meted out to her by the invisible Stage Manager.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ABERHYNNLETH TOURNAMENT

THE following week was a memorable one in the annals of Aberhynlleth. A great golf tournament was held there, to which people flocked from all parts of the surrounding country. The little place was crammed to overflowing, and with the greatest difficulty could such a thing as a bedroom be obtained. The main street was thronged with stalwart men looking out for quarters, and for once Aberhynlleth presented quite a lively appearance. The weather set in brilliantly fine and warm, and the general prospects were highly encouraging. To add to the prestige of the tournament, it became bruited abroad that no less a personage than the celebrated John Hall, junior, was expected to enter the list of competitors. On receipt of this intelligence, Jack almost went off his head with excitement.

‘By Jove!’ he exclaimed, ‘what a chance! To think of our having the opportunity of seeing one of the very finest players in the *United Kingdom*! It was worth coming to

Aberhynlleth on purpose. We are indeed in luck's way.'

Sandy was almost equally moved, for it turned out that he had once acted as caddie to Mr Hall at St Andrews. The pair talked so unceasingly of the famous John, that we all caught the infection more or less, and were on the look-out for his advent. Jack was prepared to bow down and worship at his feet, and had already exalted him into a hero of the first magnitude. It was amusing to hear the golfing men speak of him as if he were a little divinity. Even my curiosity was aroused, and when the Monday morning came I struggled down as far as the first teeing ground, where I took up my station, intending to watch the various drives off. Lady Marshall accompanied me. On this important occasion she was precluded by her sex from contesting the prizes with the gentlemen. By the rules of the Aberhynlleth Golf Club, she could only play with ladies during the big week. She was very much disgusted at this, and, as the ladies' match did not come off until Thursday afternoon, found herself reduced to a state of enforced idleness.

Since my conversation with Aunt Selina, I had decided, if possible, to turn over a new leaf,

and hold out the olive branch to my enemy. I determined to make one final attempt to gain her friendship, and even meditated throwing myself on her mercy where my husband was concerned.

'They all seem to consider I am wrong in my estimation of her character,' I mused. 'Perhaps I have been too bitter. Anyhow, if she has any good elements in her composition, surely she will give up running after Jack once she is plainly told how unhappy her conduct renders his lawful wife.' I did not quite know how the subject was to be introduced between us, it was such a very delicate one, but I resolved to think as well as I could of my adversary, and not allow my mind to run in a narrow, ungenerous channel. Aunt Selina's words had influenced me more than I was prepared to admit. Therefore, when she offered to take charge of Dorothy and little Jack on this particular morning, I accepted, and unbent so far as to ask Lady Marshall if she would accompany me to the links. My aunt heard me give the invitation, and her look of approbation was some slight recompense for the effort I had made at civility. Lady Marshall lifted her eyebrows in a supercilious and somewhat surprised manner, which angered me before she uttered a word.

‘Oh, yes,’ she said carelessly, ‘I’ll come—at anyrate for a little while. But I cannot undertake to stay with you for very long, since I have arranged to walk round the course with Mr Calthorpe and his partner when their turn comes to begin playing. My eyes are sharp, and I promised to do extra caddie for your husband, and save him the expense of a second small boy,’ she added jocularly.

‘Indeed!’ I ejaculated, with an involuntary stiffening of the facial muscles. Jack had not mentioned this arrangement to me. I thought he might have done so, but perhaps he did not want me to know. How she stuck to him! ‘I thought it was against the rules for ladies to take any part in the gentlemen’s tournament,’ I observed, after a slight pause.

‘So it is; but there is no prohibition against their walking round the links and offering what assistance they can to their intimate friends.’

‘I should have thought they—the men—would rather be without them,’ I could not help saying, irritated by her malicious smiles.

She gave a mocking laugh. ‘Why, my dear, you talk as if you were afraid of trusting that precious husband of yours in my company. I can’t eat him.’

Now was my opportunity, if only I had

sufficient nerve to act in a bold, yet tactful manner. I could feel the blood rushing to my cheeks, and it annoyed me to show the least sign of emotion in Lady Marshall's presence. I still wished, however, to come to an understanding and effect a reconciliation, but the sight of her sneering countenance overcame my good intentions in a measure, and I retorted, 'If I am afraid of trusting my husband with you, it is rather late in the day for me to show my fear, is it not?'

She shrugged her shoulders with a gesture which seemed to say she deemed it useless keeping up any show of politeness. It was less trouble to let me see in what utter contempt she held me. It is beyond my power to do justice to the cool impertinence of her tone as she said, 'Of course I know that you are horribly and absurdly jealous of Mr Calthorpe. Everybody is aware of the fact, but it comes rather hard on poor, harmless me.'

I bit my lip, and tried vainly to check the rising wrath which was rapidly sweeping away all self-control.

'Lady Marshall,' I said, 'let us be honest and straightforward with one another. We have known each other now for a good many years *in a kind of way*, but we have never really had

a satisfactory explanation. The time has come for one; don't you think so?'

She put up her hand to hide a yawn. 'Oh! for mercy's sake don't bother me with explanations and rigmaroles about nothing at all just now. The men will soon begin driving off, and I want to devote all my energies to watching them; besides there is nothing to explain. We understand each other perfectly.'

She made a hasty movement as if to leave me, but I caught at her dress and detained her against her will. Her face grew dark, but, having once broken the ice, I was not to be baffled. Her reluctance to listen to what I had to say only increased my desire to speak out plainly and unburden my mind.

'I am sorry that we have not been better friends all these years,' I said, in a low voice. 'If the fault has been mine, I wish to beg your pardon, but if you search your conscience, I believe it will tell you that, although I am partly to blame, I am not wholly so. Won't you meet me a little?'

She evaded my glance and made another attempt to depart, which I frustrated.

'We are as good friends as we are ever likely to be, Mrs Calthorpe,' she said coldly, 'and this is neither the time nor the place for dis-



cussing the matter. Please say no more on the subject; it bores me.'

'Perhaps it does,' I answered spiritedly. 'All the same, you shall and must hear me. You have as good as intimated that nothing I can say or do will succeed in making you regard me with feelings of friendship. I have tried to gain your toleration, if not your affection, but ever without success. Must it always be so?' And I timidly held out my hand.

She ignored it, and a dull red showed in her usually pale cheek.

'Yes, it must always be so; it cannot be otherwise.'

Her answer distressed me, but I made another attempt. 'Is there no possibility of our burying the hatchet? I am willing, if only you were equally so. From the very first you rejected my advances.'

'Yes, I rejected them. You do but humiliate yourself by your present attitude; it does not produce the smallest effect upon me.'

'On every conceivable occasion,' I went on, 'you have gone out of your way to hurt my feelings and put me in the wrong, more especially before my husband. I do not know your *motive*, but,' looking at her steadily, 'I can guess

at it. It is a mean and ignoble one, not worthy of any honest woman.'

'By all means take away my character, Mrs Calthorpe; it can do me no harm.'

'I have no wish to injure it, Lady Marshall, but you do so yourself. Jack made a free choice, remember. Can you not be just?'

At last I had touched a vulnerable part. She turned upon me, her green eyes flashing fire. I shrank before their venomous blaze.

'No,' she cried, 'I can't and never shall. It is useless your appealing to my feelings. I have none where you are concerned. There! I am frank. You and I cannot be friends. Fate has decreed otherwise. I hate you, and always shall hate you. Silly fool! don't tremble and turn pale, but since you have forced this explanation upon me, listen once for all to what I have to say. You took from me the only man I have ever loved in my life. He did not love me in return, but I would have been satisfied with very little. He was just beginning to care for me in a sort of way, and I believe I might have won him, nay—I *would* have won him,' clenching her strong teeth, 'had it not been for your untimely appearance on the scene. That spoilt my chance. He would have proposed to me

sooner or later had not an unkind Fate brought you across his path. You frustrated all my hopes, blighted my future, and forced me into a marriage without affection. My God!' she exclaimed, with bitter emphasis, 'you little know what it is to be chained for life to a man like Sir Eustace. He is a materialist, who systematically plays on the baser side of human nature. Small wonder if I have degenerated since my lot was linked to his.'

'Every brave woman can make her own lot so that harm sweeps idly over her head,' I said, knowing that many people pitied Sir Eustace a good deal more than they did his wife, who was fond of seeking compassion on all occasions.

'Rubbish!' she ejaculated, more forcibly than politely. 'It is easy for you to utter little moral platitudes; you have never suffered. You do not know what it is to find the love of a man wrested from you precisely when success seemed near. You ask me to forgive—to show some feelings of friendship towards you. My answer is never, never, never! The thing is impossible. There! now I trust you are satisfied, and will leave me alone henceforth.'

I shrank from her side, with a sensation of *repulsion* stealing over me.

'I did not know that you cared so much,' I said under my breath, for the vehemence of her passion awed me in spite of myself.

'What! because I am too proud to carry my heart on my sleeve? I tell you, that no woman can give herself over body and soul to a man whose mere presence is distasteful to her, without polluting her mind and undergoing torments. And,' she added, almost inaudibly, 'if she is unhappy enough to love another, her life is Hell incarnate.'

'It ought not to be—it need not be,' I returned. 'If only the woman will have sufficient courage to battle valiantly with the disloyal love, in the end she will gain peace and triumph over it. To begin with, she should not willingly put herself in the way of temptation. That can only increase the evil, and make it harder for her to steer a straight course.'

'Saint,' sneered Lady Marshall, an ugly curl disfiguring her thin lips. 'It is easy for religious people like yourself to lay down the law in a goody-goody fashion, but for men and women of flesh and blood, such copy-book axioms fall singularly flat; they do not strike home. Pray do not waste them upon me, for I am a heathen, and am not ashamed of confessing the fact.'

'Lady Marshall,' I rejoined firmly, still struggling against an inclination to lose my temper, 'if all you say is true—which I believe—you have no business to be here at the present moment. It is extremely unwise.'

'Perhaps so,' she coolly admitted; 'but it so happens that I am enjoying myself amazingly. I have not the slightest intention of leaving Aberhynlleth—even to please you,' she concluded maliciously. 'I presume that is what you want?' And she gave another of her enigmatic smiles.

'You are doing a great mischief to yourself, and also to me,' I said.

She lifted her shoulders until they almost touched her ears.

'It always seems to me that there is no greater mistake than bothering one's head about the future. I never do. If the present be jolly and pleasant, that satisfies me. As for you,' she continued, shooting a hostile glance in my direction, 'it is absurd to make such a fuss. All is fair in love and war, as the old saying goes. You have made overtures of peace. I reject them. Now we know exactly where we are, and need not trouble to keep up the farce of civility when we are alone. It is so much more comfortable to go on hating each other, as we have done for the past ten years.'

'You give me no choice,' I said sadly, infinitely pained by her speech.

'Simpleton! don't you perceive that any other relations between you and me are out of the question? I should only be a humbug if I pretended to like you. We are naturally anti-pathetic.'

At this I became fairly roused. I had done my very utmost to soften the feelings of enmity existing between us, but it was evident that she gloried in her attitude of hostility, and would not budge one step to alter the situation. Clearly it did not suit her ladyship to be friendly with Jack Calthorpe's wife. Perhaps there was a kind of savage honour about her determined aloofness, but I did not see it at the time. I was very much hurt by her words, and also greatly angered. It seemed to me that she was unnecessarily rude, and took a mischievous pleasure in wounding me.

'Lady Marshall,' I said, 'if I am as anti-pathetic to you as you say, and my husband is so much the reverse, I demand that you should leave Aberhynlleth without delay, and cease this immodest, unwomanly persecution of a man who does not return, and never will return, your affection.'

Her face flushed with wrath. 'My good woman, may I ask if Mr Calthorpe complains of what you are pleased to call—my persecution? Ah!' she went on, in jibing tones, 'I thought not. You are mad with jealousy because he likes me for a companion, and finds it somewhat of a relief escaping from his beloved Jane for a few hours of every day. The wonder to me is how he stands such constant and insufferable espionage.'

'How dare you say such a thing?' I said, choking with anger.

'Because it is the truth,' she returned coldly, enjoying my discomfiture. 'Anyone can see with half an eye that the man is sickened — yes, positively sickened by your everlasting jealousy. He cannot even look at another woman without incurring reproaches. That sort of thing is all very well for a while, but men of spirit won't stand it. Sooner or later they kick over the traces, and small wonder. If Jack—I mean Mr Calthorpe—displays a reprehensible desire to do so, you need not blame me, but yourself. And now, please, let us drop this very unprofitable discussion. Here come the men ready for the fray, thank goodness!' And, so saying, she walked towards them, leaving me *tingling* from head to foot with indignation.

## CHAPTER XX

### VANQUISHED ON EVERY SIDE

JEALOUS! Was it for ever to be the same old, hateful story? Was my fond affection for my husband always to be thus translated? Oh! it was an odious world, this fashionable, pleasure-seeking world, of which we were supposed to be members. Women were regarded as mere chattels in it, things of stone, cold and heartless. Lawful love received no encouragement. It was laughed at, and considered 'bad form.' I could have burst into tears, only what was the use? Nobody seemed to understand. People would only mock at me. I had made overtures of peace to Lady Marshall, actuated by a truly Christian spirit, and hoping by so doing to please Jack and Aunt Selina, but my advances had been repulsed, not only with derision, but also with insult. What was there left for me to do? I would not complain to either my husband or my aunt, since they had already shown an indisposition to listen to my grievances, and were inclined to treat



them as chimerical. Yet I knew that Lady Marshall was capable of going straight to Jack and giving him a garbled, one-sided version of our conversation, artfully calculated to put him against me. *She* was not scrupulous as to her choice of weapons in carrying on the warfare, and therefore possessed an advantage over me. She had but to declare that I was jealous, and the bare assertion tied my tongue. Such a statement paralysed the power of the unfortunate wife, and withdrew legitimate sympathy from her. Experience of no happy kind had already taught me this much. A feeling of helplessness and depression crept over me. To squabble with another woman for the possession of one's own husband seemed too utterly degrading for words, yet I could not disguise from myself the fact that I had made a powerful appeal to Lady Marshall. I wished now that I had not undergone the humiliation. Had I foreseen the result, I might well have been spared it. In proportion to the greatness of the effort, so were the discouragement and despondency from which I suffered. The sun shone brightly on the yellow hillocks of sand; it danced upon the blue waters of the distant *sea*, *kissing* them into myriads of tiny sparkles;

the birds twittered; grasshoppers chirped invisible at my feet; the hills stood clear against the deep blue sky. The world no doubt was fair, but to me it seemed black as night. I sat alone on the porous earth, half concealed behind a clump of prickly whin bushes. An inexpressible life weariness filled my being. If death, the mighty pacifier of human woe, had come then, he would have found yet another tired and disappointed mortal ready to accompany him to the 'unknown bourne.' But he is coy, and rarely appears where he would be most welcome. So I sat on, a prey to dismal thoughts, unheeded and unnoticed by the crowd of people gradually congregating round the teeing groun

Presently I gave a start, and once more my senses were all on the alert. I saw Jack coming along, followed by Sandy, bearing a number of golfing implements. He took up his station close to the centre of operations, and Lady Marshall, who had been talking to some other man, at once quitted him and went to Jack's side. She spoke a few words to him and smiled, a very different smile from the ones to which she had favoured me. I could not help noticing the contrast. He smiled back in return, and suffered her to take his lofting iron and hold

it. She grasped it firmly, at the same time shooting a victorious glance at me. I shrunk still further behind the whin bush. I could have felled her to the ground for daring to look at me like that. She was very neatly and becomingly dressed in a well-cut, tailor-made gown, fashioned by a first-rate London firm, and candour compelled me reluctantly to admit that she appeared to-day to best advantage. The sun had lent a shade of tan to her generally pale cheeks, our recent encounter gave animation to her features, and her green eyes shone with a kind of feline brilliancy which had a peculiar fascination of its own. Her figure was tall and commanding, and, although the lady was totally deficient in womanly charm, I could understand her proving attractive to a certain order of men. At anyrate, as she stood there, surrounded by members of the opposite sex, it was evident that she was not without admirers, however little their admiration might be worth from the point of view of a right-minded person.

And I—I was at my worst, dressed in black, and enveloped in a voluminous cape. My nose was pinched, my complexion muddy; I longed to hide myself from the eyes of mankind. Oh! *Jack, Jack*, what personal beauty had I in my

present state to keep you? A shiver ran through my frame. A sudden obscurity took the sharp edge from my despair. For a minute, everything grew strangely vague and unreal. I felt on the point of fainting. A burning heat seized me, only to be succeeded by a death-like chill. Then, as from a far-off land, I heard a voice call out, 'Ah! Hall, old man, how are you?'

An unaccountable curiosity prompted me to raise my eyes, and I perceived a long, lank stripling standing close by my side. His face was very boyish, and it wore a remarkably frank and open expression. This, then, was the celebrated John Hall, junior, the terror of golf handicappers, and who won prize after prize all over the country. He looked a very modest, unaffected youth, and I took a liking to him at first sight. There was something genuine and kindly about his whole personality. By-and-by the hero stepped on to the teeing ground, swung his driver airily over his head once or twice, and then sent the ball flying with one mighty drive right on to green number 1. A murmur of admiration rang through the ranks. The young man vacated the platform with an air of satisfied self-composure. He was in excellent form just now, so his backers assured the multitude, and that shot proved to them

that both eye and hand were in on the present occasion. Once more he came and stood close by me, keenly watching the play of his successors. But the gay scene, the hot summer sun, the groups of happy people, all removed by a great gulf from me, added to the pain tearing at my heartstrings. I bore it until Jack and Lady Marshall had disappeared over the links, following the example of their predecessors, then I rose from my seat, and staggered a few paces in the direction of home. My limbs had become cramped, and I was forced to lean against the railings which divided the railroad from the golf course. I did not feel at all well, but I took no heed of mere physical sensations. They were as nothing in comparison with my mental anguish. Half blind, dizzy, sick at heart, I at length regained the privacy of our little sitting-room. Thank goodness! it was empty. I had the place to myself. I looked around, and drew a deep breath of relief. I could not even have borne the society of the children at that moment, let alone Aunt Selina's, which was always a trifle formidable. On the sofa lay the coat Jack had worn at breakfast. He had thrown it down in a hurry, never being distinguishable for tidiness. His pipe was on the mantel-piece. On the writing-table near the window fluttered

a letter which he had been in the act of writing when called away to the golf ground. Everything reminded me of him, and bore traces of his recent occupation. I buried my face in the coat—*his* coat. How happy we had been once! Until this winter, nothing of any importance had ever really come between us, and now we lived together in a perpetual state of friction. Was it his doing, or all mine, as Aunt Selina insinuated? My faults were many, but, God help me, I could not curb this fault of loving him, and wanting him to be entirely my own. Was it wrong to wish to keep my husband's affection? In olden days, I should have answered the question unhesitatingly in the negative; but now, my standards of morality were getting hopelessly confused. They had been wounded and jeered at so often, that I no longer placed dependence on my own judgment. I was told that right and wrong were only abstract terms, having no real significance beyond that conferred on them by custom and civilisation. Of late, my landmarks had been sorely shaken. I hardly knew where I was or to what truths to cling. Lady Marshall scoffed at them all. In her presence, I felt the veriest fool. But the terrible part of it was, that although in my innermost consciousness I thought the others

to blame, they apparently were perfectly happy, and I—the virtuous one—only acted as a wet blanket upon their enjoyment. This puzzled me, and set my pride aflame. One thing was clear; I was not wanted, and would be far better out of the way. Suddenly a thought darted into my mind, whilst an overpowering impulse took possession of me. I allowed myself no time for reflection, but proceeded on the spur of the moment to act upon the new suggestion. Yes, here was a way of revenging myself for the slights, the insults and humiliations which I fancied I had received. Perhaps they would be sorry later on for having been so unkind to me, and driven me to the step I contemplated taking. Anyhow, it appealed with peculiar force to my excited imagination. I would *make* Jack think of me, whether he liked it or no. I had borne affront too long. It was now my turn to show that I was a woman of spirit, as well as my adversary. Jack was not really bad nor heartless, but most men require some startling event now and again to lift them out of the slough of their everyday selfishness. So I reasoned, with a certain grim satisfaction, which yet failed to stifle the ache at my heart. Half-an-hour later I stood *on the station platform*, waiting for the train to

arrive. I had decided to steal away like a thief in the dark, not leaving any address behind me. That was how I intended to punish them. Please don't laugh. I know now how childishly absurd my conduct was, but at the time I don't think I was altogether responsible for my actions. Before going I pinned a few hastily-written lines to the pincushion in Jack's dressing-room, informing him that, what between Lady Marshall's impertinences and the everlasting golf, my life at Aberhynlleth had become simply unendurable. 'I did not wish,' I went on to say, 'to mar his or her pleasure, and had therefore determined to absent myself for a time, considering that the best mode of avoiding future unpleasantness. When she saw fit to go back to her own house, I would also return to mine. Until then, her presence produced an irritating effect upon my nervous system, which in the circumstances was doing me harm, and might also injure the child shortly to be born. The inditing of this precious epistle afforded me a certain melancholy pleasure, and I strove hard to couch it in a dignified strain worthy of the occasion. I am afraid I did not succeed altogether, but I was very much agitated at the time of writing. Nevertheless, I considered my sudden flight most effective and dramatic, and wondered



much if Jack would regard it in the same light, I was not quite sure.

'At anyrate,' I said to myself with a tremulous smile, as I pictured his amazement and consternation, 'it will give him a good fright, and possibly that may bring him to his senses and make him regret his behaviour.' In imagination I could see him searching the house from top to bottom for me, and hear him calling out, 'Janie, wifie; I say, wifie, where are you?' I laughed in my sleeve when I dwelt on the disturbance my mysterious disappearance was certain to create in the household. Well, serve them right! Aunt Selina had repulsed my confidences in the most cruel manner. She had thrown me back upon my own resources just when I stood most in need of sympathy and moral encouragement. After being dubbed hysterical, I did not feel disposed to consult her again in a hurry. As for Jack, for a long while past he had been too completely under the influence of the golf fever to display much solicitude for the wife of his bosom. He left her to take care of herself, and doubtless imagined, after the fashion of his sex, that because he was enjoying himself she must necessarily be doing the same. *A fallacy.* My first impulse was to return home

and stay there quietly until the rest of the party saw fit to remove from Aberhynlleth; but, on thinking the matter over, I came to the conclusion that such action on my part would be altogether too tame to produce a sensation. The game of hide-and-seek required to be played with spirit; for I made perfectly sure that Jack would promptly set off in search of me, to the discomfiture of Lady Marshall. The thoughts of his consternation and remorse at finding the mother bird flown from the parent nest tickled my fancy. I therefore despatched a telegram to a respectable lodging-house in London, where we had often put up during a frost or the season, and announced my intention of arriving that evening in Sackville Street. With a firm voice, I asked for a first-class ticket to the Metropolis. Then I saw my luggage labelled, and, without allowing myself to take a single farewell look at Aberhynlleth, stepped into the train, which had just steamed into the station. I was delighted at my own bravery, and was congratulating myself complacently upon it, when I received somewhat of a shock. As we passed close by the majestic 'Virgin,' I recognised Jack's pink shirt and white flannel coat in the distance. He was completing the homeward round. My heart stood still at the sight.

and, in one lightning-like flash, the folly of my proceedings became revealed. 'What if he takes no notice of your vagaries, and does not attempt to find out your whereabouts? Supposing he allows you to play this foolish game of pride out to the bitter end, and leaves you to realise the consequences of your wicked act?' Thus spake the inward monitor. I tried not to listen to the promptings of conscience, but they were not to be denied. Tears forced their way through my lids. A sickening feeling of depression stole over me. Already I repented me of my deed, and wished it undone, but it was too late for regrets. The train was an express, and did not stop for two hours. Even if I descended at the first station and took a ticket back to Aberhynlleth, I could only arrive late at night, and should be obliged to give a full explanation as to my absence. If Lady Marshall had not been there to glory over my defeat, I could have appealed to Jack's mercy and concealed nothing from him; but the recollection of my rival, of her jeers and jibes, prevented my common sense from gaining the ascendancy. Once again she stood between me and my husband, and divided us. No matter what the price I had to pay for my escapade, I must go on with it now. But the further the train bore me from the little quiet village on the Welsh coast, the

more clearly did it become borne in upon me that I had behaved not only like a coward, but a fool. It was a contemptible act for a married woman to forsake her husband, her children, and position at the mere approach of the enemy. It was her duty to make a stubborn fight, and contest every inch of ground. A mighty self-scorn filled my being. The false glow of pride which had hitherto sustained me evaporated, leaving a deadly flatness in its place. When I reached London, it was too late to telegraph to my husband, but I resolved to do so the first thing on the following morning. Whatever Jack's shortcomings might be, I could not exist without him. I was finding this fact out by degrees. Removed from the baneful presence of Lady Marshall, I recognised that I had no cause for jealousy where she was concerned. Golf might have rendered my husband a little inconsiderate, but no greater crime was to be laid at his door. I had been foolish, mad! Instead of believing his assurances, I had wilfully placed the worst possible construction on things, and deserted my post by his side. Ah! Aunt Selina was right in not sparing me. I deserved all, and a vast deal more than she said. When people complain of the unhappiness of their lives, most of them muddle them themselves. So it was with me.

## CHAPTER XXI

### NEMESIS

‘MERCY on us, Mrs Calthorpe!’ ejaculated Mrs Barton, advancing to meet me as I descended from the cab ‘how shocking bad you do look, ma’am. Whatever is the matter?’ And she eyed me pityingly.

‘I am not feeling very well,’ I said. ‘Would you mind showing me to my room at once? I think I will go and rest.’

‘Yes, do. It is the old room, the one that you and Mr Calthorpe always occupy. There were parties in it, but, as luck would have it, they left yesterday morning, so I was able to get it all clean and ready for you.’

‘I am glad of that,’ I responded wearily. ‘One likes a room one is used to.’

‘Of course one does. And Mr Calthorpe, how is he?’ inquired Mrs Barton.

This was the first occasion on which I had visited her establishment unaccompanied by my husband, and I fancied I could detect a touch

of curiosity in the worthy landlady's tone. It put me on my mettle.

'He is quite well, thank you,' I answered, with sudden dignity; 'I expect him to join me in the course of a day or two. He was playing in a golf tournament, and wished to see the finish of it. The gentlemen are all mad about golf nowadays. It is quite a craze,' suppressing a sigh.

My explanation apparently satisfied good Mrs Barton, for she desisted from further interrogations respecting Jack, much to my relief, and showed me upstairs. I threw my hat aside directly I reached my room. My head ached to such an extent that the slightest weight upon it set it on fire. Mrs Barton glanced at me with an air of motherly commiseration.

'Ah! poor dear,' she said, 'I see what ails you. You'll have to be worse before you are better. Won't you go straight to bed, and let me make you a nice hot cup of tea? You have had a long journey to-day, I daresay.'

'A long journey and not a very pleasant one,' I returned. 'Yes, I will go to bed, and perhaps you will bring me something to eat a little later on.'

'That I will,' said Mrs Barton, retiring towards the door. 'I'll look after you myself, dearie, for you want care and attention, situated as you are.'

I hurried off my clothes and crept between the sheets, with a feeling of thankfulness at having gained a haven of rest, no matter how humble. The events of the day had proved exceedingly disturbing, and my moral equilibrium was more or less out of gear. Added to this, I experienced certain physical sensations which occasioned me considerable anxiety.

'Nonsense!' I said to myself. 'It can't be—at anyrate, not yet.' I sought to obtain ease by turning on the pillow, but directly I did so another voice whispered, 'Such things are. It is by no means impossible.'

And away from Jack! My heart sank at the prospect. I made a vigorous effort, however, to dismiss the subject, and chatted on extraneous matters for some little time with Mrs Barton, when that lady appeared bearing a tray containing various delicacies. I had had no lunch, and did not realise how downright hungry I was until the food was actually placed before me. I eat with a relish, in spite of my pains and aches, whilst Mrs Barton looked on with an

expression of approval. When I had finished a very creditable meal, she said, 'Now, I am going to draw the curtains, and perhaps you will go to sleep. You have had a tiring day, and it is the best and wisest thing you can do. Nothing will refresh you so much as a good night's rest.'

'Yes, I suppose so,' I responded meekly, comforted by her kind and motherly manner. 'Anyhow, I will try.' She turned to leave the room, and was just on the point of closing the door when a sudden twinge of pain caused me to call out after her, 'I say, Mrs Barton, supposing I want anything in the night, how can I communicate with you?'

'Do you see that bell rope over your head?' she asked. 'It rings into my bedroom. You have nothing to do but give it three or four hardish pulls, and I'll be with you in a few seconds. I'm a very light sleeper, and the least noise suffices to awake me.'

This time she went, and once more I was left to chew the bitter cud of my own reflections. A hundred times over I heartily wished myself back at Aberhynlleth, as I lay tossing from side to side, unable to close my eyes. The hours wore slowly away; I could not obtain



the rest I coveted. The pains, which had assailed me on and off during the afternoon, gradually increased in intensity, until at last I could no longer fail to recognise their real nature. Then a wave of despair invaded my spirit. So this was how my punishment was to be meted out to me. A more disagreeable, inconvenient one could not well be conceived. The hot season in London was close at hand, and when I thought of being laid up for weeks, perhaps months, in a little, stuffy room in a little, stuffy street, my heart sank. In my thoughtlessness and folly, what had I done? Here I was, cut off from husband, children and home, with a time of travail staring me in the face, and it was entirely my own doing. I had no one to thank for the situation but myself. That thought did not lessen my regrets, as may be imagined. During the silent watches of the night, I had plenty of opportunity of reflecting on the imprudence of my past conduct. Many things now appeared to me in a totally new light. I began to realise that I had perhaps been somewhat exacting in the happy, bygone days, and had grown to consider constant attendance from Jack my due. Even with the golf fever hot upon him, he was far better than the majority

of husbands. When I gave him most provocation, he had never been otherwise than kind and long-suffering. It was only when I goaded him beyond endurance that he occasionally lost his temper, and, taking a leaf out of my book, paid me back with a few sharp speeches. My own infirmities of temper suddenly became startlingly apparent. I saw where and how I had failed of late, and recognised that a more conciliatory policy towards golf and various other little matters would probably have left me entirely unassailed in Jack's affections. If he strayed now from his allegiance, I could not honestly blame him. He had learnt how lightly I was ready to forsake my home ties, and how small a part they played in the scale when weighed against my pride. Thank God! there was no hateful man in the business. That was the one redeeming point in it. Jack would more readily forgive my escapade knowing that it had been conducted singly, and that no living masculine creature, save himself and our boy, occupied a niche in my mind. Nevertheless, my numerous shortcomings lay heavy on my conscience, and, as dawn advanced, I grew more and more wakeful and uneasy. At last, I could bear the situation no longer, and, raising

myself on the pillow, pulled hard at the bell rope. The bell tinkled faintly from afar, and, encouraged by the sound, I once more dragged at the rope. A silence succeeded, during which I listened anxiously; then the stirring of some heavy body was audible in the room overhead. Presently Mrs Barton came running down, attired in a dressing-gown, and with her front hair screwed up in curl paper.

‘What is it?’ she asked breathlessly. Do you want me, Mrs Calthorpe?’

‘Yes, oh, yes,’ I answered. ‘I am dreadfully sorry to call you up, but I cannot stand it any more. I waited as long as I could, but please send at once for a doctor. I only hope he may get here in time.’

Mrs Barton was alarmed, seeing the state of affairs, and in a few minutes had roused her underlings. The housemaid was sent off in a cab to the nearest doctor, whilst the kitchen-maid departed with instructions to visit a well-known nursing institute in the vicinity. My confinement was prematurely approaching; brought on, no doubt, by distress of mind and the railway journey, undertaken under harrowing circumstances. And now, a fresh *fear* assailed me. What if the unborn child

should be injured in any way by being introduced thus early into the world? Should the poor mite suffer through my acts, I felt that I could never forgive myself. It was unpardonable of me not to have thought of all this before leaving Aberhynlleth. Yet, until the present moment, such a contingency had never occurred to me. It added a new horror, and served still further to depress my spirits. But before another hour had gone by, pain obliterated thought. My strength and patience were severely tried. I suffered horribly—terribly, but what right had I to complain? It was fitting that I should pay the penalty. But how hard it is, no one save a mother can conceive.

. . . . .

Later on, I retain a very confused recollection of what happened. People seemed to come and go in the room. I fancied I heard hushed voices, scarce raised above a whisper, and saw a strange, bearded man placing a handkerchief saturated with chloroform under my nose. An interval of comparative ease ensued. My senses wandered and grew drowsy. Everything seemed dream-like and unreal. I said to myself, 'Is this you, or is it not you?'

I put out my hand and felt the sheets, think-

ing that if the texture of the cold linen greeted my fingers, it would be a sure sign that I was I. The blinds were drawn. I had not an idea what the time was, having long since ceased to take count of it. Death might have taken me then without the slightest resistance on my part. A strange detachment from things earthly stole over my spirit. The matters which had so distressed me of late appeared infinitely small and trivial now. I wondered how I had ever been silly enough to magnify them into such importance; they were mere trifles. Suddenly a cry rang out — a tiny, tremulous, infantine cry that resembled the bleating of a young lamb. It penetrated to the very depths of my being, and filled me with a vague but exquisite joy. The pain had ceased as if by a miracle. I felt weary and feeble, but otherwise at rest.

‘Is it a boy or a girl?’ I inquired faintly.

‘A boy,’ came the answer.

I folded my hands and smiled. ‘Ah! thank goodness. Jack wanted another boy. I am so glad. He will be pleased when he hears.’ And then—but after that I remember no more for many days. They told me later on that I was desperately ill, and that for over a

week my life was despaired of. The accumulated trouble of the last few months, combined with the lack of repose, had done its work, and brought about a temporary breakdown of my nervous system. They said I was delirious, and in my delirium I muttered a strange jumble of golf, John Hall, junior, the Aberhynlleth course, Lady Marshall and Miss Lark. But I knew nothing. After the birth of my little son, all was blank for a comparatively long period. . . . When I regained my senses, Jack was sitting by my side, and Aunt Selina stood at the foot of my bed softly crying. I put out my hand, and Jack clasped it in his. For several seconds we looked at each other in silence. Then he said, in a husky voice, 'My wife, my darling little wife, thank the good God. He is not going to take you from me after all. I have been so miserable thinking I was to lose you for ever, and that I was accountable for your illness.'

'What has been the matter with me?' I asked, in mild amazement.

'You have been ill, my dear one—ill unto death, and for days your life hung in the balance. The doctors had given you up, but the crisis is past, and you are restored to me!'

I shut my eyes for a moment and thought hard, trying to arrange the confused images which presented themselves to my mind. It was still partially clouded. 'Jack,' I said, after a short pause, 'I don't seem to remember rightly, but there was a baby, was not there?'

'Yes, Janie, my beloved. He nearly cost you your life.'

'Was—was he like other babies, Jack? I was so afraid I might have done him some harm. I would not have injured him for the whole world.'

'Don't worry about that. The brat is small, as might be expected, but he is sound in wind and limb, and the doctors agree that, with a certain amount of care during the next couple of months, there is no reason why he should not grow into a healthy youngster. Do you know that he is as like me as two peas? The likeness is so great that I can see it myself.'

A wave of thankfulness inundated my heart. 'I have much to be grateful for,' I said gravely. Then as the past, with all its follies, returned with painful distinctness, I said, 'Oh! Jack, can you ever forgive me? I have made such a terrible muddle of it all, and gone near to wrecking both our lives.'

He put his dear face down to mine, and gazed deep into my eyes. His soul shone through his own—the strong, sweet, manly soul.

‘My wife, my little one,’ he whispered. ‘It well-nigh killed me when I discovered that I had driven you away. I had not an idea—I never thought—Yet all the while I was behaving like a regular brute.’

‘It was my fault, Jack. I was jealous and unreasonable. I expected too much, and, fancying myself an ill-used individual, made mountains out of molehills. I see it quite clearly now. Aunt Selina warned me at the time that I was going the wrong way to work, but I was angry, and refused to listen to good advice. In short’—with an attempt at a smile—‘I was just like a naughty child who has the black dog on its back, and can’t get rid of it.’

‘You poor dear!’ here broke in my aunt, the tears standing in her eyes, ‘I was harsh—purposely harsh—with you, because I thought it would be for your ultimate welfare. My experience all goes to teach that it is a fatal kindness to back a wife up against her husband. The two are bound together, and must learn to put up with one another’s frailties and shortcomings. But I was a little too hard upon you,



and have never ceased to blame myself since the day of your sudden flight from Aberhynlleth. To tell the truth, I did not realise that you had taken the situation so much to heart.

‘How good you both are to me,’ I said softly. ‘If you only knew the wicked, unworthy thoughts I have had. I hated myself so for harbouring them, yet they were ever present in my mind, and ended by completely poisoning it.’

‘Hush, darling,’ interrupted Jack, seeing I was beginning to get excited, ‘we will think no more of disagreeable subjects. We have both something to forgive. Let the past bury its past. Eh? what do you say?’

‘Dear Jack!’ I murmured fondly. ‘How did you know I was here?’

‘Mrs Barton very properly telegraphed home when you were first taken ill, and the telegram was forwarded to Aberhynlleth. Your aunt and I started at a moment’s notice, leaving the children in charge of their nurse.’

‘And Lady Marshall?’ I inquired. ‘Did you leave her behind also?’

Jack reddened. ‘Look here, Janie, I’ve had enough of that woman, one way and another. I mean to have nothing more to do with her in future, only she’s so damned insinuating. Yes,

I left her at Aberhynlleth. She is very much *épris* with John Hall, junior, you will be amused to hear.'

'And does he return the attachment?'

'Not he; he's not such a fool. He is as nice and honest a young fellow as ever stepped, and I have invited him to come and stay with us later on.'

'He had a nice face,' I observed, closing my eyes wearily, for I was weak.

'Come, come,' put in Aunt Selina, 'we must have no more talk just now. She is tired, Jack, and you had better go out of the room for a while.'

But I grasped his hand tight, and detained him. 'No,' I said, 'don't go. I have wanted you so badly, that I feel as if I never could do without you again.'

'All right, little woman,' he said lovingly, 'I'll sit as quiet as a mouse whilst you go to sleep like a dear. We wish you to get well, remember.'

He was as good as his word, for, when I awoke a couple of hours later, feeling infinitely soothed and refreshed, my husband was still sitting by the bedside. To have him there—to feel his touch—to hear his voice was Heaven.

'Janie,' he said presently, when I was once

more awake, 'I want to say something to you. I want to say that if—if,' making a heroic swallow, 'you really dislike my playing golf so much, I'll—give it up.'

At this, my heart leapt triumphantly, for his offer proved conclusively that he loved me even better than the game; but I was not to be outdone in generosity.

'No, Jack,' I said, 'I have been very foolish from first to last. Now I give in, and henceforth withdraw all opposition to your golf. It pleases you; and that ought and *shall* be enough for me. When I get quite strong,' I added, with a fine smile, 'you shall even teach me how to approach. Not so very long ago you quoted Horace Hutchinson to me. I, too, have studied my Badminton. Listen to what the oracle says with reference to the golfer's wife: "If she is a wise woman, she will give in at once; the disease is incurable, and ends only with life." I throw up the sponge. I abandon the situation. I will even try and catch the disease. There! I can't say more than that, can I?'

Jack put his arm round my neck, and kissed me.

'You certainly cannot, dear little woman,' he returned. . . .

I do not know that there is much more to

tell. After a while I regained my strength, we went back to our home, and life resumed its usual course. I will not say that it was ever quite the same again as during the first blissful years of my married experience; but, perhaps, that was inevitable. By degrees I acquired more patience and toleration, and, seeing my own faults clearly, was less inclined to censure those of my husband. In conclusion, I would remind all female friends, suffering from the effects of the extensive and prevalent golf mania, that although it undoubtedly possesses many serious drawbacks, there are worse things in this world. Golf is a healthy and innocent amusement, if nothing else, and is far preferable to the common vices of betting, gambling and drinking. Even whilst we lose our male belongings as companions, let that be a consolation. At least they are out of mischief, as a general rule. To be just, golf has its merits as well as demerits. For myself, I put up with it in process of time, because I discovered that I *had* to do so.

About six months after our return, I was made happy by the receipt of a letter from Miss Lark. She informed me that she was engaged to be married to a young doctor, but,

as he had yet to buy a practice, she begged to be allowed to come back to us until her intended was in a position to marry. I welcomed the girl with open arms. I had never regarded her in the light of a governess, and, in the altered state of affairs, I felt that she might be trusted implicitly. Besides, I had vowed to cure myself of my jealousy; it only made me ridiculous, seemingly, and I therefore determined to conceal, even if I could not altogether succeed in overcoming it.

So ends a very simple tale—a tale of mistakes—of follies and infirmities of temper. I have schooled myself to relate them, not because I venture to think they can have much interest for the general public, but because I trust some poor wretch of a feminine golfing victim may be spared the errors which I committed, and which so nearly wrecked my home and happiness. If my sisters in misfortune can profit ever so little by the experience of the writer, then she will be content, and more than content. Her work, in spite of its slightness and sketchiness, will not have been written in vain.

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